DARK HOURS
A STUDY OF THE BACKGROUND SCENES IN
THE LIFE OF JOHN MILTON

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His nature was sensitive. He was not trained to meet the hardships of life.

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He possessed a colossal pride; he was egotistical.

The failure of his first marriage was a shock he never quite overcame.

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Because of it he grew irritable at home and abroad.

His work with the Commonwealth added to his antagonistic outlook on life.

He became aloof and unapproachable. A gulf grew between him and his daughters which could not be bridged.

Neither Milton nor his daughters understood in what way they were to blame for the unhappy life they had together.
Preface

Life for a genius is not always a happy one. More often than not it is a life of struggle and sorrow; of discouragement and defeat. True, there are moments when a genius reaches the heights, but those moments are few; and he climbs to his heights alone, and he stands on his high place alone; for there is never anyone who can quite share, or quite understand the exaltation of that high moment. Perhaps, though, the genius feels that the glory of the instant is worth the buffets and heartaches of the world.

Such moments for the genius, Milton, were few, but no doubt he felt as others have felt, that the little time he stood on the summit was worth the long, hard years of struggle.

Milton's life was full. He knew hate and love, storm and strife, danger and tragedy; but he found peace at the end of his days. He died leaving a name immortal, and works "so written to after-times" that they will not die.
This thesis records the dark scenes of John Milton's years, with emphasis on his domestic life; particularly his first marriage, and the relationship between his daughters and him.

"I looked that my vineyard should bring forth grapes," he cried, "it brought forth wild grapes." This was true! "Wild grapes" seemed to grow for Milton, not only in his domestic life but also in his political and social life.
The sketches in this thesis are original. They were done by Miss Dorothy Pickett. She studied illustrations of the Puritan period for her background work; and she studied the material in this dissertation for her interpretation of the characters.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

In this bibliography I have listed only the books which I used directly in my research. I have made no attempt to list everything. In my reading I often found a bit here; a paragraph there; or discovered a line in some unexpected reference, which helped with the writing, but which I can scarcely classify as a vital source.


__________, Tractate on Education. London: 1644.


"I have done enough already for my undutiful daughters," said Milton to his brother, Christopher, who had come down from Ipswich to see him before setting out for the north. He found Milton suffering from gout, sitting huddled in his elbow chair, his head thrust a little forward and down. His eyes saw nothing of the outside world, but they looked within and gazed along the years just travelled.

"I am ill, and tired," he told his lawyer brother, "and it is time I made a will."

Christopher nodded, and voiced agreement. "Yes, if you like," he answered. But Christopher made no move to secure paper and ink. He sat silent, listening to Milton's quiet voice as he continued.

"The portion due me from Mr. Powell, my first wife's father, I leave to the unkind children I had by her. I have received no part of it, and they shall have no other part of my estate than the said portion; and what I have besides done for them, they having been very undutiful to me; all the residue
of my estate I leave to the disposal of Elizabeth, my loving wife."¹

This was July 20, 1674. Christopher probably made little comment after Milton ceased speaking. No doubt he agreed with his brother’s attitude. Certainly the man had endured his share of trouble, and had a right to dispose of his property as he wished. Christopher himself could bear witness that the girls had been undutiful. They seldom had shown their uncle anything but resentful faces when he came to visit, and he remembered how often he had heard the murmur of their complaining voices through the house. Deborah, the youngest, had been a little better than the others. She had a mind and disposition like her father’s, and was more companionable, but she had often followed the ways of her sisters.

Yes, Christopher agreed that they deserved nothing, but he neglected to set the will down in writing. It was not until later in that year, several days following a Sunday night on the fifteenth of November when Milton died, that Christopher got around to recording the testament.

When the girls heard the terms of the will, they were furious. They blamed their stepmother, saying she had schemed to bring such terms about. Their aunts, uncles, and cousins

among the Powells abetted the girls, urging them to contest the legality of the will. The attitude of these relatives was greatly motivated, naturally, by the fact that they did not wish to pay the thousand pounds due from Mary Powell's estate, for which they were legally bound and in circumstances to make good. They advised the three daughters to have the will set aside on the ground that it was deficient in form. The result was that the court decided that each girl should receive one hundred pounds, and it granted letters of administration to Elizabeth, the widow, to see that this was done. Elizabeth complied at once with the ruling; but the girls thought the sum too small. Elizabeth thought it too much, and these opinions didn't help to improve the feeling of animosity which had existed for so long a time between the two parties.\(^2\) Elizabeth had something like six hundred pounds left, which she pocketed, and took with her to Nantwich in Cheshire.

But whether the will was just or unjust, the fact remains that it brings to light much that is of value in the domestic life of John Milton.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 202-203.
II

Milton remained a bachelor until he was thirty-five, that was the year 1643. Then, when spring came tripping down the streets of London one fair day, he suddenly set out for the country without telling anyone where he was going, or why. In a month he returned, bringing a young wife with him.

His bride's name was Mary Powell, and she was the daughter of Richard Powell, a gentleman who lived at Forest Hill four miles from Oxford, and who was a magistrate and the father of a large family. But the fact which astounded Milton's friends most about the union was that he married into a family of Royalists, who were completely opposed to him in political and religious views. The situation was hard to understand.

Mary was seventeen at the time of her marriage. This age difference was sufficient breach for the two to span, but Mary added another difficulty by being the complete opposite of her husband in nature and temperament. She had been brought up to believe that the drawing room was all she need ever know of a home, and house-warming parties all she need understand of housewifery.3

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The marriage was doomed to dismal failure. A high-minded, intelligent man had bound himself to an uneducated, frivolous girl, who was capable only of appreciating her husband's good looks, but not his talents or abilities. What had induced Milton to wed himself to such a dull and ordinary person?

There are several theories, the first being the money transactions that had been going on between the Miltons and the Powells for a good twenty years. It concerned a debt of five hundred pounds, long over due, that had taken John Milton to Forest Hill to see Mr. Powell in the first place.

Richard Powell was a man who had never lived within his means. He conducted his household with the careless, easy hospitality of a true Cavalier gentleman, and had been borrowing money for many years wherever he could get it. Among those from whom he borrowed was the elder Milton. At the time of John Milton's advent into the family, Mr. Powell was mortgaged to the Miltons, father and sons, more deeply than his estate had any prospect of paying off. No doubt this was the reason he had no objection to giving Milton his daughter and promising him a thousand pounds with the bride. This was the same "portion" Milton never received, and which he spoke of bitterly to Christopher at the time he made his will.

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Considering the nature of Milton at this period of his life, it would be characteristic of him to overlook the temper and disposition of the girl he asked to share his fortunes. He lived in a world of poetry and fancy at that time, and his mind was not on practical values. He disregarded the essential feminine qualities that were necessary to a congenial and happy marriage. He probably clothed Mary in an array of graces and virtues which he drew wholesale from his fancy. If she smiled, it was because she was appreciative; if she fell silent, it was because she was wise.

He had no past romantic experience to guide him - no means of comparison. He had once, at twenty, fancied himself in love with a girl he met in a casual walk through a suburb in London. She had moved swiftly across his vision, and was gone before he could know her. When he went to Bologna, he was fascinated with the new type of beauty he saw there, but he admired only and did nothing. It is small wonder then that, with this first direct romantic contact, he was carried away with the youth and freshness of a little country girl.

His nephew, Edward Phillips, implies that the failure of his marriage was due to the conflict in political opinions between the Miltons and the Powells; but John Aubrey believes it was "the exceeding staid environment of Milton's house that upset the young wife." Mary had been used to a household gay

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5 Kemble, op. cit., p. 258:29-36.
with the laughter and antics of the Cavaliers. She could not reconcile herself to the sober environment of Milton's home.

Kemble believes the failure was due to the fact that Mary was devoid of common sense. He states bluntly that there can be some excuse for her being unintellectual at this age; "a little less excuse for her being frivolous, but no excuse for her being devoid of common sense."  

Mary would not adjust herself to marriage. Her idea of a home was not a place where a wife spent her days in the company of a quiet, contemplative husband. She was not fitted by nature or training for any such atmosphere. Frivolity and gaiety had filled her days, and she expected that kind of social life to continue. Mary had not the slightest idea how to make herself agreeable to an intelligent husband; moreover she lacked the capacity to understand.

Saurat believes that Milton married under the impetus of a "swelling wave of physical passion." Indeed Milton himself admits he "hasted to light the nuptial torch."  

Whatever the reason, the marriage failed, and Milton did not repent at leisure, but he repented at once. Within a month Mary deserted him. She did not like the smoke of the city; she did not like the view from her windows which overlooked the

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churchyard; she did not like the idea of sharing the same bed with Milton. In fact, she refused, and in so doing gave the poet the first great shock of his life. She wanted to get back to the pleasant countryside at Forest Hill where she could enjoy the freedom of her jovial and undisciplined home, and the easy companionship of the officers at the nearby garrison. She asked Milton for permission to visit her family.

Milton readily consented. Perhaps he hoped her mother might be able to put some sense in her head--make her realize what a wife's duties were regarding a husband. Perhaps he thought absence might make her think better of him. Mary promised to return at Michaelmas, which was on September 29; and Milton agreed to this date.

At the time of Mary's leaving, Milton was occupied in attending his father, whom he had established under his roof. The old man had been living for the past three years at Reading with Christopher. But Reading had been taken over by Essex, the Parliamentary gentleman, and it seemed safer for the elder Milton to leave, rather than remain longer with his Royalist son.\footnote{Richard Garnett, \textit{Life of Milton} (London, Walter Scott, 24 Warwick Lane, 1890), pp. 91-92.} He came gladly to John. Between these two there was a strong and deep affection, and Milton hoped to make his father's remaining years comfortable and happy. His regard for his father was no commonplace filial duty; it was an abiding love filled with warmth and gratitude. He welcomed the opportunity, too, for
another reason. Years before, he had curtly overridden his father's desire for him to enter the church, and his disobedience still lay heavy upon his conscience. He hoped to make up to his father in companionship what the good old man had missed because of his son's obstinacy.\textsuperscript{10}

Time went by swiftly in the busy days that followed. Michaelmas came before one could scarcely realize it, and Milton began looking for Mary. Coaches came down from Oxfordshire; they passed near his house in Aldersgate, but none stopped to set Mary down at Milton's door. He wrote reminding her that she had a husband waiting, but his letter went unanswered. He wrote again and again. There were no replies. Milton's embarrassment grew keen, and he began to brood about the situation. Finally he sent a messenger who was "dismissed with some sort of contempt."\textsuperscript{11} If Milton had any previous hope that his marriage would be successful, it now vanished. His pride was wounded bitterly. He chafed over the hasty step he had taken. He argued that he should have ascertained Mary's defects before he led her to the altar; he condemned himself bitterly, but the deed was done, and it didn't look as if there were anything he could do about it at the moment.

\textsuperscript{10} Kemble, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 254.
\textsuperscript{11} Garnett, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 90.
It might be that the Powells had poked their noses in where they had no business. Right now they felt pretty independent. The king had established headquarters at Oxford; therefore the Powells were reaping the benefits of some nice political favors. Naturally they began to repent the fact that they had matched the eldest daughter with so staunch a Presbyterian, for they feared it might go against them "when the court came to flourish again."12

Whatever may have been the motive behind Mary's failure to return, Milton felt dishonored, and began to doubt whether or not he should ever take her under his roof again. He studied over the problem in his usual characteristic way, refraining from venting his anger upon Mary, but trying to get at the root of the situation. There was something wrong, he concluded, with the institution of marriage when it forced people to remain linked in a union as incompatible as his and Mary's. There should be causes other than the "law of Moses" that would permit a breaking of ties. "Indisposition", for instance, "and unfitness, and contrariety of mind."13 The chief benefits of conjugal society, he argued, were solace and peace, and a violation of these furnished a greater reason for divorce than adultery. He began to write what he thought about these facts, and his first pamphlets

12 Hayley, op. cit., p. 181.

on divorce appeared. The Presbyterians were horrified—divorce was too strong a pill for these seventeenth century folk to swallow! They protested loudly and universally, and Milton found himself the center of a very unpopular controversy. He believed, however, that he was right, and so persisted in his attitude, thereby bringing an avalanche of scandal down upon his head, and widening the already wide breach between the Powells and him. But in spite of all this furor he held firm, retaliating with the statement: "If the law make not a timely provision, let the law, as reason is, bear the censure of the consequences."\(^{14}\)

\(^{14}\) Pattison, op. cit., p. 262:30-31.
The summer following the year 1645, the Parliamentarians came into power, and the Royal cause was lost. The Powells found themselves weakened in political influence, and again in their usual straitened circumstances. They began to question whether or not they had been wise in allowing Mary to break with Milton. An alliance now with that personage would be to their advantage. They began hoping for a word from Milton, and they probably let it be noised about that Mistress Mary had stayed too long at Forest Hill. Milton, however, made no move towards reconciliation.

Milton was very busy these days on a collection of poems, principally sonnets, and for his leisure hours had turned to his friend, Lady Margaret Ley, a Parliamentary woman, for companionship. Lady Margaret was a brilliant conversationalist and a person of charming manner. She made his dull hours very bright and happy indeed, and became the "honored Margaret" of his Sonnet X. Lady Margaret was the wife of Captain Hobson, a very accomplished gentleman of the Isle of Wight; so nothing, therefore, could come of their relationship except a close friendship.
But what else could he have hoped for, since there was still Mary, who bore his name and whom the law recognized as his wife, whether she chose to accept the circumstance or not!

Milton had been accused of not being able to adjust himself to female society, and it has been hinted that this defect might have had some bearing on his relationship with Mary; but there can be little truth in such a statement, for the women friends who came into his life brought some of the happiest and most inspiring hours he ever knew. He was very fond of "refined female society,"\textsuperscript{15} and was completely at ease with women of charm and accomplishment. Strangely enough Mary had neither. She didn't even have a pleasant disposition, and, according to her husband, no soul. This lack of soul Milton could not forgive; for soul was essentially a part of marriage if that marriage were to succeed. Physical desire that did not include mind and heart was not good. "If the body do out of sensitive force,"\textsuperscript{16} he reasoned, "what the soul complies not with," then desire is nothing more than base sensuality.

No, it was not a case of being unable to adjust himself to female companionship, but an inability to adjust himself to

\textsuperscript{15} Hayley, \textit{op. cit.}, II, p. 214.

Mary. He had felt, when Mary first left him, that he was caught in a trap with no means of escape. Then he suddenly saw her in her true colors. The realization brought him to his senses, and he began looking about for what was best and of most worth to his life. He took the good friendships that came his way and pushed his past mistake into the background.

Another interesting woman crossed his path at this time. Her name was Miss Davis,* and she was young, good looking, marriageable, and from a very respectable family. She seemed to think well of Milton, and Milton appears to have returned her regard in double measure. Milton would like to have gained her hand, and was willing to brave public opinion to do so, but Miss Davis hesitated. She was unduly conscious of the fact that Milton had a wife, who would not live with him, and since she was unable to overlook this social barrier, the suit failed to prosper. Her discretion probably saved Milton the penalties, both in law and in reputation, which he would have suffered had his suit been successful.

There was a third woman who also played an important part in his affections. She did not come into his life until later, but it is well to speak of her here because she furnishes added

*Note: No given name is known for Miss Davis. It is generally conceded that she was the daughter of a Dr. Davis. Biographers believe she is the "virtuous young lady" referred to in Sonnet IX.
MILTON dictated with his leg thrown over the arm of the chair
IV

Although Milton seemed apparently to get along very well by himself, his friends felt that he harbored a secret discontent; and indeed he may have. It is one thing to push a grievance into the recesses of one's mind, and another to keep it from ever showing its face again.

"He hasn't gotten over his wife's desertion as he pretends," they argued. "A man's wife belongs under his own roof, and it's high time this two-year breach were healed." So they got their heads together and began making plans to bring about a reconciliation.

The Powells were getting anxious, too. Now that the Independents had come into power, Milton was a man of consideration and would, therefore, be useful as a protector. Their home at Forest Hill had been taken over by the besiegers and they were living as best they could in the city. They existed in a very uneasy state, and when rumors began reaching them regarding Miss Davis, their peace of mind wasn't improved. They were only too glad to lend their aid to anyone who could help bring about a settlement.
Milton had a friend--a Mr. Blackborough--who lived at St. Martin's-le-Grand, and whom he often went to see. One day, having gone down to visit his old friend, he was surprised to see Mary pop suddenly in from an adjoining room, prostrate herself at his feet, and with tears in her eyes beg his forgiveness, and plead with him to take her back. The excuse she had ready was that the fault had been her mother's and that all along her mother "had been the chief promoter of her frowardness." At first Milton hesitated. He had done a deal of thinking in the time Mary had been away; but at length her tears and abject pleas got the best of his will power and he weakened. He took her back on one condition: that she would live with him as his wife. This she readily promised.

It was a "well played scene and it was successful." The Powells got what they wanted. Milton took Mary home, but if he had any thoughts of having his young wife to himself they were soon scattered, for the Powells moved into his house bag and baggage--even the mother-in-law whom he could still count on to wield an influence over her daughter and continue to disturb his peace.

How gruelling those months must have been to Milton! He had to live his days, and eat his meals to the tune of their Cavalier talk from morning until night. Such a situation did not help to

18 Pattison, op. cit., p. 269.

draw a husband and wife together. However, by this time he had
given up all hope of companionship with Mary and contented him-
self with the fact that she was doing her duty to him as his wife.
And this situation, as he was well aware,—but avoided thinking
about—was a poor basis for marriage. It made his life one of
frustration and incompatibility.

Mary bore him four children. Of these, three daughters,
who inherited their mother's perversity, lived to grow up. The
son died in infancy. "I looked that my vineyard should bring
forth grapes, it brought forth wild grapes,"20 cried Milton in
his bitterness.

His first daughter, Anne, was born in July, 1646,
appearently in good physical condition, but she soon became ill
and deformed, though her features remained attractive. She had
an impediment in her speech which made her of least use to
Milton later when he was blind and needed the girls to read to
him.

Her deformity distressed Milton greatly. This in itself
was enough to bear, but other troubles were piling up fast. His
eyesight was rapidly failing, and his household was one of daily
strain and confusion, with no hope of conditions bettering
themselves.

In January Mr. Powell died, leaving his affairs in a ruinous
state. His Forest Hill property had passed to one Robert Pye by

20 Garnett, op. cit., p. 141.
foreclosure of mortgage, but he had willed it, in his usual high-handed manner, to his eldest son. There was a stock of timber at Forest Hill, which Milton hoped to realize something from, but the timber turned out to be a doubtful asset. The Parliamentarians had appropriated it, and had voted a part of it towards repairs on a church at Banbury. Milton found that there was some property at Wheatley, certain cottages and a half yard of land, which looked as if it might bring in a profit if rented at the right price, but by the time he paid Mr. Powell's debts, and the widow's jointure, he had practically nothing left. All hope he had of receiving something towards the one thousand pounds Mr. Powell had promised him at the time of his marriage was completely gone. 21

Mr. Powell's death was followed in less than three months by the death of the elder Milton, leaving his son bereaved of a companionship essential to his life. He believed that without his father he would never have made a place for himself in the literary world, and it was always his deep desire to repay his father in as many ways as possible; but Milton never felt that he fully repaid him. It was his cry when speaking of his father, "whom God recompense." 22


In 1648, Mary, the daughter who most resembled the mother, was born; in 1650, his son, John, at "about half an hour past nine." The boy lived to be a little past two years of age, and his death hurt Milton deeply. The fourth child, another daughter, Deborah, was born the second of May, 1652. The flyleaf in Milton's Bible records the following: "My daughter Deborah was born the 2d of May being Sunday somewhat before 3 of the clock in the morning, 1652. My wife her mother dyed about 3 days after. And my son about 6 weeks after his mother."  

Milton's situation was pitiable. He was distressed over his blindness, bowed down with domestic troubles, and faced with the problem of rearing three small girls. Anne was six, Mary not yet four, and Deborah a babe in arms. It was a sorry business for both father and daughters. The little girls were doomed to depend on a blind father for their care; and this same blind father was faced with a task he had not the slightest idea how to meet.

His salary at this time, as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, was somewhat less than three hundred pounds a year, but now that his blindness made it necessary for him to have an assistant in his office, the sum was reduced to one hundred fifty pounds.  

23 John Aubrey, Collections for the Life of Milton (printed from the manuscript copy in the Ashmolean Library at Oxford).
25 Vaughn, op. cit., pp. 31-33.
Milton was drinking a bitter cup. His life was all struggle and conflict. No wonder he and his children got off to such a bad start. Trouble and worry prevent one from seeing things clearly; they crowd out time which one would normally give to meeting a situation, or understanding a problem. He was struggling to adjust himself to a world of darkness, and at the same time, groping for a means of being both father and mother to three helpless children. He was lost! Especially so because he was not fitted for the job ahead of him. He had come out of the university with a head full of classical knowledge. He had been reared with tenderness and shielded from the harsh influences of life. He grew up in a moral and intellectual atmosphere, loving beauty, truth, and harmony. Now everything had gone against him. His home was a place of dissension, and the literary path he had so happily travelled was blocked, and he was forced to use his talents in the civil strife going on about him. His country demanded his pen and absorbed his time; he became literary chief for the Parliamentary Party. Now he had to still any rhythmic measures of poetry that rose to the surface of his soul, and he had to think in terms of political prose instead; the kind of prose that England needed in her life-and-death struggle for liberty. It was a difficult job. It was a trying

26 Kemble, op. cit., p. 250.
The young man who once had thrilled to the vision of a world to conquer had learned, in the long years which followed, that a world is not easily subdued.

This same young man had loved music, the old romances, Shakespeare, and the colorful masques which the stern Independents condemned; but these still remained in Milton's soul, rising at times to war within him. At such times it must have been doubly hard to hold his pen to fierce political prose. There was a time when he could escape the confusion of life by turning to his books, but now that escape was cut off. If he wanted to read, he had to listen to someone fortunate enough to see the words. If he wanted the solitude of his garden, or the quiet of his study, he had to be led there. If his young children were ill, if they were treated unkindly, if he heard them crying, he had no way of knowing what was wrong. All he could do was take whatever explanation his servants chose to give.

How Milton managed the next three years is not known. It is highly probable that he and his children were neglected. Servants do not concern themselves more than is necessary, and they have little real affection to bestow. Friends tried to help; they came with advice, but there is little practical value in that. It was all too great a burden, and that is probably why Milton turned again to marriage.
Though Milton had no eyes to seek a second wife for himself, he was able to secure one without their aid. The girl was Catherine Woodcock, a daughter of Captain Woodcock, whom Milton had known either through family or political connections. The girl was charming, kind, and amiable, and Milton was fortunate in finding her. He realized it, too!

They were married November, 1656, and with the solemn pronouncement: "You are now man and wife," a new life opened for Milton. Until now he had had to depend on others for his eyes, but not until he met Catherine could he depend on the heart of any other. He loved her deeply and was happy. The sympathy and understanding he had always longed for, Catherine brought him. She had all the qualities Milton thought an ideal wife should possess: gentleness, understanding, and unselfishness. Always she was "tender in her care of Milton." 28


Milton brooded over her death. He dreamed of her, and in his dreams thought she came back. He poured out his love for her in a beautiful sonnet, calling her his "saint, in whose person, love, sweetness, goodness shin'd." He was distraught.

Catherine was also a good manager, and Milton's household soon took on an orderly atmosphere. His children were better looked after, and showed decided improvement. It is too bad that this kind, capable girl could not have lived, for then the story of Milton's daughters might have been a different one. She came into their lives while they were yet young and impressionable. Through her they might have had a more normal home life and better rearing. But she died in confinement fifteen months after her marriage, having given birth to a daughter, who followed her shortly in death. Masson calls this "a little incident," but the little incident left a sadder, lonelier Milton than the one who existed before.

Milton brooded over her death. He dreamed of her, and in his dreams thought she came back. He poured out his love for her in a beautiful sonnet, calling her his "saint, in whose person, love, sweetness, goodness shin'd." He was distraught.

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29 Vaughn, op. cit., p. 284.
"Methought I saw my late espous'd saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave . . ."
without her, and turned to his work, hoping to forget by fighting more fiercely the cause of the Parliamentarians. He worked long and hard, pouring out his arguments unceasingly upon paper.

There was talk that the cause of the Stuarts was growing stronger, but Milton would not heed. When he was warned that monarchy was gaining, and that the republic was dying, he wrote more passionately than ever. Events began to outstrip him, but he continued to write; they caught up with him; so he rewrote what he had set down in his last copy before the ink was scarcely dry.

Then the blow fell! Charles II was restored and Milton lost everything--his post as Latin Secretary, his pension, and his personal possessions. He was forced to fly for his life. Blind, helpless, and led by the hand, he sought safety in the home of Bartholomew Close, where his faithful friend, Cyriac Skinner, had arranged for him to be secretly received. There he was kept well out of harm's way.31 To have shown his face would have been as much as his life was worth. For four months he remained hidden, and in perpetual fear. Then in August, 1660, with the passing of the Indemnity Bill, he was able to hope again for freedom.

31 Kemble, op. cit., p. 287.
How Milton escaped the scaffold will always be a mystery. There were any number of people determined to see him hanged and burned. His nephew, Phillips, gives credit for his escape to Andrew Marvell, "who acted vigorously in his behalf, and made a considerable party for him." If this is true, Marvell must have wielded tremendous influence, for people were put to death for crimes much less. There was the poor bookseller, Twyn, for instance, who was later hanged, drawn, and quartered because he printed a book which reproduced in substance some of Milton's arguments.

Milton can lay his escape not only to Marvell but also to many other influential friends, who were unwearying in their efforts to keep him safe. They even went so far as to get out a false report of his death. Milton's blindness, too, might have had a certain effect, and invoked some pity among his enemies.

But whatever the cause, he was spared; and when the Indemnity Bill came out, his name was not among the exceptions of those still to receive sentences, or among those set down for further punishment. It was now safe for him to come out of hiding, but not

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32 Pattison, op. cit., p. 312.
33 Garnett, op. cit., p. 125.
34 David Masson (Encyclopaedia Britannica, XVI), p. 335.
safe for him to move abroad with any degree of freedom. The mob spirit still ran wild in London, and there were public hangings and quarterings of those who the mobs considered should not have been pardoned; and there was a burning, by the hangman, of Milton's pamphlets. If the blind poet had appeared upon the street, he would have been mobbed at once, regardless of the fact that he was legally free.

Finally the hysteria quieted down, and he left the house of Bartholomew Close, and took up quarters in Jewin Street. Here he brought the girls and established a home again. How Anne, Deborah, and Mary had fared during this critical period is not known. How they were treated, where they took lodgings, or how they managed is a blank page in history. The only record is of their coming back to their father.

Now that they were all united again, Milton began to consider his future. He was through with fighting political battles; he was going to do what he had always wanted to do - write poetry. He longed to begin the epic that had stirred these many years within his soul; to live his days in peace while he created the spirit and the color of his great poem.

His blindness had turned his thoughts inward once more to the dreams of his youth, but he saw more clearly now than he had seen then. Spiritual values had truer meaning, and the struggles

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35 Vaughn, op. cit., p. 42.
THOMAS ELWOOD, his young friend, often read to him
His chief aim in teaching his daughters was to make them useful to him; so he began by instructing them in Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, and Hebrew. He did not teach them to understand these languages. To be able to read them was all he considered essential. "One language," he said, "was enough for a woman." If they could correctly pronounce the words, his own mind would supply the meaning.

So the girls, with the exception of Anne, who was excused because of the impediment in her speech, were condemned to pronouncing — and pronouncing precisely — each word in these various languages. It was tedious work. Thomas Ellwood, a young Quaker, who often read for Milton, relates how exacting he was. "He understood by my tone," says Ellwood, "when I understood what I read and when I did not, and accordingly would stop me, examine me, and open the most difficult passages for me."37

37 Garnett, op. cit., p. 146.
Milton had an ear for language. To mispronounce it was as bad to his sensitive nature as to hear music sung off key. He could not, and would not tolerate it. Consequently his daughters labored many difficult and wearisome hours. When one considers the time and work Milton expended in teaching the girls to read these various languages, and that a little more labor would have taught them to understand one or two of them, we wonder that Milton did not put forth this extra labor. The reading then, would have been interesting and profitable to the girls; and certainly more profitable to him.

It all goes back, of course, to his attitude regarding the education of women. He had the typical seventeenth century viewpoint. A knowledge of domestic affairs was sufficient for females. Was it not true that "nothing lovelier can be found in woman, than to study household good"? They needed little else. True, being blind, he had gone beyond the essentials and taught his girls to read, which was something other fathers weren't doing. Also, he had brought in a mistress to instruct them, and considering the established status of females in that day, he felt that, in so doing, he had given them an unusual advantage. Just what the mistress taught is not known. There

is no record as to whether or not her teaching went beyond the household arts, but it is known that Mary and Deborah learned to write at this period. Poor Anne never so much as learned to write her own name! Whether it was the mistress, Milton, or someone in the household who taught the girls writing is a matter of conjecture.

Milton considered he had been more than fair to his daughters, since they had received opportunities other young women didn't get. Why he didn't put into practice some of his advanced views on education is hard to understand. He had written some very forward-looking articles, which aroused many of the educators of his day to visions of reform. It looked as if he might be able to bring about a change in the system.

He bluntly stated that seventeenth century education was absurd and decorative, and failed in achieving any of the aims whereby learning might be put to practical use. He said that students found it so unpleasing and so unsuccessful that they carried away a hatred and a contempt for it; and that it made moral shipwrecks of those partaking. He advocated a complete and generous education that "would permit a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public of peace and war."\(^{39}\) He argued that the tremendous amount of time put in on education gave results that were too small. All this was true, but in proposing a remedy he suggested that education be a digesting of much and diversified

\[^{39}\text{Pattison, op. cit., p. 262.}\]
material. Here was the weakness in his system. It was this method of giving out "diversified material" that he applied in his teaching. He poured learning rapidly into the young minds that came to him without giving them ample opportunity for assimilating it. His own nephew, Edward Phillips, was a good example of this. Phillips always employed his pen on topics about which he had snatched some information, or of which he had only a surface knowledge.

In teaching his own daughters Milton put this same procedure into practice, but in a very limited measure. He inculcated into their minds the pronunciation of six—some biographers say eight—languages without giving them the least understanding of what they were speaking. His own children, therefore, were not even as fortunate as the young students who came to learn under him—they weren't able to assimilate even in a small measure what they were taught.

The sound reforms for which he pled, such as putting to use what one learned, and getting adequate results from time spent, he advocated for men, but not for women. He could not think of women in terms of education. When he forced his daughters to read perfectly a variety of languages which were incomprehensible, they naturally came to hate the tasks he imposed upon them. The results, then, achieved the very weakness Milton said that the present day system brought about—a contempt
for learning. It probably never entered his head that if he personally had put into practice some of the worthy views he preached to the educators of his day, he might have qualified his daughters in some measure to appreciate what he taught them; and also to appreciate him.

He demanded long, fatiguing hours. Being blind, he had to give more scrupulous attention to his dictation, and to the proofing of his works than a writer having the use of his eyes. In order to get accuracy he had to be severe. He kept the girls constantly at work. Often he had hours of over-mastering inspiration when he worked so feverishly that the girls could hardly set the words down fast enough. It was nothing for him to dictate forty lines at a time without pausing, and then immediately reduce that amount to twenty. If they retarded his work, he grew impatient; if they stopped him a moment, he flew in a temper. Many times - on fire with inspiration - he forgot that they were there; forgot that their young fingers were growing cramped; their eyes weary; their restless bodies yearning for freedom; and their spirits crying for escape beyond the four walls which hemmed them in with their blind father.

Frequently he called them at night to take down verses that came to him in the quiet hours.\(^{40}\) They dreaded being roused

\(^{40}\) Garnett, op. cit., p. 147.
from a sound sleep and made to leave their comfortable beds
in order to write down some poetry their father had thought of
in the night. They came grudgingly - one or the other - and
sat drowsily listening to his voice vibrating clear and strong
in the still air while they strove to get the words on paper.
How could they know that the voice which spoke in those silent
hours was immortal? How could they know the verses, which
they set down with such reluctant hands were priceless? Or how
could they know that long ago their father had had dreams so
splendid that he was willing to labor and study many years with
the hope of "perhaps leaving something so written to after-
times that the world would not willingly let it die."41

His eyes were on the stars. They did not know that. Their
father showed them little of his heart. Had they been more
willing, more companionable, they would have seen his heart in
the lines they wrote down, but they never found it. They saw
only a blind parent who was a hard taskmaster, who demanded
long hours of work, and who refused to let them do as they
pleased.

Like other young girls they had their own ideas, and didn't
want them interfered with; and they thought their father's rules
were so rigid that they had no liberties left. Milton, however,
was no different from other fathers of his time. He was an autocrat and ruled his home with a firm hand. He had no conception of any longings or desires his daughters might have. He meant well, but his methods were wrong. He should have ruled by love and understanding; instead he ruled by command. He had fashioned his own actions upon the belief that, although his deeds might escape the eyes of man, they could not escape the eyes of God; and he meant his daughters should follow that same line of action. He never took pains to explain his philosophy; he merely stated with definite finality how it must be.

He demanded strict adherence to three principal rules: frugality, obedience, and virtue. He would hear of no exception to any one of them. He was especially strict as to virtue. He purposed that his girls should grow up to be good women, and chaste. He himself had reached adulthood spotless and high-minded, and he intended that they should do the same. He would tolerate no loose actions. There would be no slipping out at dusk to meet any young man in the shadow of an English hedge if he knew it!

The girls chafed under his methods, and finally began to rebel. At first they grumbled among themselves; later they openly revolted. They did not stop to reason the situation through, or pause to consider that their father's standards
were a logical consequence of his own nature—a man who practices severity upon himself will certainly expect it of others.

As time went on, they ceased to have any scruples about mistreating their father. They grew undutiful, unkind, and careless of his being blind. Milton was upset by their actions, but continued to stand firmly by his principles. The situation in his home became more and more unpleasant. He and his children grew farther and farther apart, and it was out of this estrangement that the legend grew that he was cruel to his daughters. Milton would have been horrified could he have heard the accusations. He had striven only to do his duty, and to do it for the good of his daughters.

The root of the trouble went back to the fact that these girls, being motherless, were left much to the care of servants, and grew up resisting discipline. They learned early many little tricks of evasion which their father knew nothing about because he could not see what they were doing. When finally they reached an age where they were of use to him, and he had definite tasks for them to do, they were not prepared for coercion; they became indignant and felt they were unjustly used. They thought he demanded too much. Milton, of course, was eager to forge ahead, and it is probable this eagerness far exceeded their
youthful efforts. But this was not cruelty. Their tasks may have been irksome and tedious, but they could not be considered any more than that. 42

Dr. Johnson was responsible, to a great extent, for promoting the idea of Milton's cruelty to his daughters. He wrote many scathing indictments, stating boldly that Milton was insufferable in private life, and sour and cruel to his family. But there is no real basis for his accusations - he was simply intolerant. Johnson, a rabid Royalist, and an orthodox religionist, was prejudiced against Milton by nature and instinct; he could see no good whatever in the blind poet. 43

Milton may have been a harsh and severe disciplinarian, but a cruel father he never was. Seventeenth century England believed that woman's chief qualification was obedience, and that it should be given at once and unquestioningly. Milton was typical of his time. Moreover, he made the mistake of judging his daughters by his own tastes and standards. He forgot that their mother was a society-loving, light-headed young woman, and that his daughters might have inherited some of her characteristics. It was unthinkable that they should grow rebellious, but he learned by sad experience that they deliberately resisted his.

42 Brown, op. cit., XV:121-122.

43 Kemble, op. cit., p. 283.
ELIZABETH was a good wife, and regarded her husband with great veneration.
Milton had been eight years a widower, and was now fifty-four. His friend, Dr. Paget, an eminent physician of the city, had a relative who he thought would make a good wife for Milton, and he strongly advised that he remarry. Milton needed the aid of a female companion because of his blindness, Dr. Paget said, and because of the state his household had fallen into.45

The girl recommended was Elizabeth, daughter of Mr. Robert Minshull of Wistaston. She was thirty years Milton's junior, but Dr. Paget was sure she was "a lady who might contribute to his happiness."46 So the quiet Cheshire girl, who was twenty-eight years old, and who was considered a spinster at the time of her marriage, became Milton's third wife.

She was a pretty creature with "golden hair, which one connects pleasantly with the late sunshine she brought into

45 Hayley, op. cit., p. 167.
46 Vaughn, op. cit., p. 47.
Milton's life." It was not the bright gleaming shaft that Catherine had brought, but it made Milton's days contented and happy.

There was no doubt that Elizabeth loved her husband dearly. From the time of her marriage to the hour of his death she lived for him alone; his comfort came first. Moreover, she appreciated him, and appreciation was something Milton had rarely known in his home.

She took great pride in everything he did. In her opinion he was the most remarkable writer of his time, and none could surpass him. She was proud of his fame, proud of his friends, and proud of the letters he received from distinguished visitors. She treasured these letters, and was careful always to keep them safe.

She and Milton were very companionable, and spent many pleasant hours together. Sometimes she sang to his accompaniment on the bass-viol. Sometimes the two sang together. Milton would laughingly say she had "no ear, yet a good voice", but he enjoyed their musical evenings, and looked forward to them.

At the time of his marriage to Elizabeth, Milton was living in Jewin Street, but shortly moved to Artillery Walk,

47 Garnett, op. cit., p. 144.
48 Pattison, op. cit., p. 316.
Bunhill Fields. It was a pleasant house with a delightful little garden - Milton always had a garden. It was almost as essential to him as the house itself. There he would walk for hours composing his verses; then come inside to dictate them. If the weather were bad, he sat in his favorite elbow chair and mused on his own thoughts or talked with Elizabeth. His wife was a good conversationalist, and seemed able to discuss many subjects. It is recorded that she talked often with him about Hobbes (1588-1679), whose work intrigued her.49

Elizabeth was active and capable. She very soon put his household in order, and kept it that way. She learned early that her husband had certain fixed habits; so she took pains not to let anything interfere with them. He liked regular hours for rising and for going to bed; he liked time for meditation and for Scripture reading. She willingly observed his wishes in all things; moreover, she studied ways and means of giving her husband every comfort. Aubrey, who knew her, said she was "a genteel person of a peaceful and agreeable Humor".50 She more than fulfilled Dr. Paget's expectations of her.

How she got along with the three girls is not definitely known. It is evident that they resented her coming, for, when one of the maid servants, who first heard the news of Milton's

49 Garnett, op. cit., p. 144.
50 Pattison, op. cit., p. 316.
plan to remarry, broke it to Mary, this second daughter replied that it was no news to hear of his wedding, but, if she could hear of his death, that were something. It was Elizabeth's misfortune that she came into their lives at the difficult adolescent period. Anne was seventeen, Mary sixteen, and Deborah eleven. Anne and Mary were the chief trouble makers; Deborah followed along in whatever way she was influenced. If the girls rebelled at their father's discipline, it is certain they rebelled in double measure at their stepmother's.

Elizabeth must have had a troublesome time of it, for their characters were formed now, and there was little she could do to change them. She probably insisted that they adhere to the rules of conduct laid down by their father, and in so doing brought added ill will upon herself. No doubt the girls denounced her to all who would listen, and, like Milton, she found herself accused of being cruel to them.

Bishop Newton, in speaking of her, says: "She was a woman of most violent spirit, and a hard mother-in-law to his children, but she regarded her husband with great veneration and studied his comfort."  

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51 Masson, op. cit., VI:476.  
52 Pattison, loc. cit., p. 316.
Dr. Johnson also takes this opportunity of venting his spleen again. He asserts that Elizabeth persecuted the children and cheated them at Milton's death. If Elizabeth were so cruel, how could they have lived with her six long years, enduring ill treatment all the time? The plain fact was that they resented her authority, and used their tongues against her. In regard to cheating, the only possible defrauding Elizabeth could have done was in connection with the will, and it is very possible that she may have influenced her husband here. However, it must be remembered that Milton regarded his will as a means of discharging a debt of gratitude. His disposable property could not have given her more than a moderate living. He considered that he was quite fair when he left his daughters the thousand pounds still due from the Powells. He believed it was an honorable debt that should be paid, and at the time of his making the will the Powells were in circumstances to make this obligation good.

Mary Fisher, a maid servant in Milton's house, tells this interesting story. Towards the end of Milton's life when he was sick and infirm, Elizabeth prepared something for dinner one day which she thought he would like. On coming to the table he said: "God have mercy, Betty, I see thou wilt perform according to thy promise in providing me such dishes as I think fit while I live, and when I die thou knowest I have left thee all."

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53 Vaughn, op. cit., p. 49.
54 Pattison, op. cit., p. 316.
Milton believed that in making his will in favor of Elizabeth he was merely requiting her for all the loving care she had given him; and that the little he could leave would be small enough payment indeed.\textsuperscript{55}

He had endured much from his daughters. They had been such a trial to his patience that he had almost broken under the strain, but he had borne with them as best he could. At last, however, when they had openly rebelled at helping him any longer, he sent them out "at considerable expense to learn some curious and ingenious sorts of manufacture that are proper for women to learn, particularly embroideries in gold and silver."\textsuperscript{56}

It was truly a sad state of affairs! The daughters he should have been able to depend on, he could not. No doubt the reason he remained unmarried so long after Catherine's death was the hope that his girls would become capable and trustworthy in the management of his affairs, but he was doomed to disappointment. They certainly kept alive in his memory the mistake he had made in his early marriage. Just as their mother had refused to assume her duties to her husband, so the daughters chose to reject obligations due their father. Their names have gone down in history as the daughters who embittered the life of a great man. It is a poor way to be remembered.

\textsuperscript{55} Loc. cit.

ANNE, the eldest, was of little or no assistance to her father
Anne, the eldest daughter had an indifferent attitude toward her father. Of course, her deformity, the impediment in her speech, and the fact that she was often not well were handicaps that probably excluded her from family plans. No doubt she felt inferior and left out, and therefore came to have little concern for her father's interests.

What Anne's mental characteristics were is not known. She never learned to read or write; but whether she was incapable of learning, or whether her father considered her speech impediment too great a handicap, cannot be determined. Aubrey, in speaking of her, hints at some other defect she might have had, which excused her from being taught, or of being of any service to her father. He makes the statement that he doubts "her affliction was the chief cause of excusing her."57 Of what this chief cause was we have no record, but possibly there was something in her disposition and temperament which made her disagreeable.

Perhaps it was a mental defect. We can never be certain about Anne! She was a pretty girl, and it is too bad if her character grew as deformed as her body.

There has been much conjecture regarding Anne's deformity. One theory states that it resulted from an injury at birth; another, that there was a possibility of congenital syphilis. The last theory belongs to Saurat, who believes that Milton himself was a congenital syphilitic, and passed the disease on to his children. He bases his arguments upon two facts: Milton's blindness, and the death rate in Milton's family.

Saurat feels that the disease was all along growing in Milton, and that during the Horton period it became more virulent. For this reason then, when he came home from the university after having taken his degrees, he remained six years in his father's house without making any effort to adopt a profession. His eyesight consistently grew weaker, and Saurat believes that his eventual blindness, and the complicated joint infections he suffered in later life can be traced to a syphilitic strain.

How can it be proved, however, that the time Milton spent in his home at Horton was occasioned by this disease? Shall

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we throw away the facts which biographers have affirmed that, since Milton wanted a literary career, he took this time for intensive study? His well-to-do father certainly encouraged him to do so, and saw that he had every advantage during those days. They were the happiest Milton ever knew; they were golden years of apprenticeship when he was learning his vocation. He studied; he walked in the woods and fields; and he wrote his first glorious poetry. There was no record of failing health.

The only record of weakness pertains to his eyes, and Saurat's accusations here are again difficult to prove. Milton could easily have inherited weak eyes from his mother, for she had very defective vision, and used spectacles at thirty years of age. Besides, Milton misused his eyes. He read long hours by flickering candle light, which didn't improve the weakness any, and he studied constantly. "My appetite for knowledge", he records, "was so voracious that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches." 59

Aubrey, in speaking of young Milton's studious habits says: "When he was very young he studied very hard, and sate up very

59 In his Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda, May, 1654.
late, commonly till twelve or one o'clock at night; and his father ordered the maid to sit up for him. Milton, indeed, was interested in nothing but books. Consequently he abused his eyes so badly in youth that they failed him at the prime of life when he needed them most.

Saurat's theory is further disproved by Professor Edward Parsons' discovery of a manuscript by an unknown author which states: "His blindness which proceeded from a Gutta Serena, added no further blemish." It is thought the unknown author of this composition was Dr. Nathan Paget, Milton's friend and physician; and if there were anyone who understood Milton's blindness it would be Dr. Paget.

It may be interesting to pause here and explain a further theory regarding the poet's blindness, which has nothing to do with the syphilitic speculation, but it is unique and, therefore, bears writing about.

Dr. Heinrich Mutschmann, a German, came to the conclusion, after some research on the life of the poet, that Milton was an albino. He says that Milton had a strong aversion to light, and

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60 John Aubrey, *op. cit.*, Appendix II.

61 Kemble, *op. cit.*, 267. From *The Life of Milton* by an unknown author. The manuscript was discovered by Professor Edward Parsons in a volume of Anthony Wood's in the Bodleian Library.
found the brightness of day painful to his eyes. He, therefore, preferred shade and semi-darkness; and this fact influenced both the style and subject matter of his writings. It is a most unusual explanation indeed—and a most amusing one. However, Mutschmann's contention has so little foundation that it should be disregarded, and it surely has no bearing on the cause for his blindness.

Mutschmann calls the condition a "lightshade complex"; but failing sight often brings about such a state. It does not necessarily follow that Milton was an albino. Blindness can be traced to any number of causes. In Milton's case failing sight attacked first one eye and then the other. It began insidiously but progressed steadily until complete darkness resulted. His eyes, however, remained normal in appearance, "clear of blemish or of spot." The most probable explanation for the poet's type of blindness is glaucoma. Alfred Stern was the first to mention glaucoma as a possible explanation. It will be interesting to note the reasons in favor of Dr. Stern's theory:

Primary chronic glaucoma is a disease that attacks in a gradual and insidious way, and causes a steady deterioration of sight. The rapidity of its progress varies in different cases. It may be a matter of several years, as it was in Milton's case,

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before total blindness results. The nature of the disease is that the pressure within the eyeball is increased, due to a defective outflow of lymph, and this pressure causes slow destruction of the fibers of the optic nerve. Complete blindness ultimately results. The patient first complains of obscure vision as if a cloud were in front of the eye. It is recorded that Milton complained of "smoky vision", and of seeing a "rainbow halo around every naked light."^63 In general appearance the eye continues to be normal; and in the majority of cases the disease commences in one eye—in Milton's case the left—before the other, but always attacks both eyes sooner or later. This description of symptoms corresponds precisely with the recorded accounts of Milton's case. Therefore, the Gutta Serena, which Dr. Paget is credited with having named as the cause of Milton's blindness, may have been glaucoma.

But to get back to Saurat and his theory! His second argument concerning Milton's syphilitic strain was founded on the death rate in Milton's family. It is true that the mortality rate was high. His son, John, died in infancy; his first wife, Mary, in childbirth at twenty-six; his second wife, Catherine, in confinement; and her daughter a few weeks later. His daughter,

^63 Kemble, op. cit., p. 270.
Anne, who married late, died in childbed, and her child at about the same time. Deborah had ten children, and the greater number died in infancy; only two survived their mother.

Where, however, is the proof that these deaths were due to syphilis? It was not uncommon in the seventeenth century for mothers and infants to die. There was a lack of medical knowledge, inadequate obstetrical equipment, and a definite absence of hygienic methods. These deaths could have been caused by any disease resulting from obstetrical deficiencies.

Also, when we consider that baby John lived to be two years and three months old, we cannot help feeling that this was rather a long period for a child afflicted with syphilis. Then, too, if Mary, the mother, whom Saurat considers syphilitic, died when Deborah was born, it seems strange that the mother should die and the syphilitic baby live. The child would certainly have had the germs in her blood at birth. Other explanations can easily be given for these deaths because there were three epidemics of disease during this time: in the autumn of 1657, and in the spring and autumn of 1658.

If there is any real basis in Saurat's argument that Milton was afflicted with congenital syphilis, we can easily understand

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64 Brown, op. cit., IV:31.

65 Charles Creighton, A History of Epidemics in Britain (Cambridge, 1891).
MARY, the second daughter, found her tasks tedious and irksome.
IX

Of all his children Mary was the most deficient in affection, and gave Milton the most trouble. She resembled her mother, and it is evident that she resembled her not only in looks, but also in disposition. Her attitude towards Milton was identical with that of her mother—she abhorred him.

If Mrs. Milton hoped to be revenged upon her husband, she certainly achieved that revenge in Mary, for she was able to mould this young girl's mind after the pattern of her own; and Mary's mind accepted every impression she gave it.

Whether she did this consciously or unconsciously, we cannot say. The fact remains that she accomplished her purpose, and that the vindictive spirit of Mary Powell Milton lived on in her daughter long after she was dead.

Mrs. Mary Powell Milton was not one to hide her feelings; she was too selfish and shallow for that. She never got over her resentment at having been wed to Milton. A light-headed, gay Cavalier would have suited her better, and trivial conversation was more to her interest. All she ever heard in
Milton's house was meaningless talk about political liberty, taxes, and a man named Cromwell. There was no sense to it, and she frankly told her daughters so. Young Mary agreed.

What was more Mrs. Milton didn't like her husband's principles, or his writings, and she unstintingly aired these grievances whenever she could get sympathizers near to listen. More often than not the sympathizers were her own daughters. Mary always listened gravely to all the injuries imagined, or unimagined that her mother complained of and although she understood little of these complaints, she stored them away, nevertheless, in her mind.

No wonder Mary was a trial to her father. Aside from the fact that she had been perversely influenced by her mother, she had a strong taste for the frivolities of the Royalists. She had inherited her mother's liking for the gay and foolish pleasures of the time, and hated the austere, thoughtful aspect of her home. She certainly disliked her father! Of this fact we have eternal proof in the statement she made on hearing of her father's remarriage when she said it would be news indeed could she hear of his death.

The Mary we see in Nunkacsy's picture of Milton dictating to his daughters is pure fantasy. It is not probable that Mary ever stood gazing with such a tender and admiring expression fixed upon her father's face. No doubt she stood--
or sat—with scowling countenance fastened on the book or parchment in her hands, and endured reluctantly whatever labor was required of her.

To Mary, along with her sister, Deborah, was assigned the task of reading, and of taking Milton's dictation. She loathed the duty, especially the reading. It was tedious to pronounce exactly words that had no meaning. What was the good of it anyway! One can imagine Mary reading the lines, clipping off the words with a contemptuous tongue, openly antagonistic. One can see the blind father carefully attending the thought, but hearing the sharp resentment of his daughter's voice through the phrases. No wonder Milton cried out in Samson Agonistes:

"I dark in light expos'd
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong."67

Was he thinking mostly of Mary when he set down those lines? Certainly she had no conscience when it came to hurting or neglecting her father. Allying herself with Anne, she was the one who was responsible for conspiring with the maid servant to "cheat him in his marketings," and who "made away" with some of his books, and would have sold the rest to the dunghill women."68 had opportunity offered.

67 *Samson Agonistes*, 75:76.

Mary began early to rebel, and as time went on she grew more and more resentful. Milton must have reached a place where he dreaded calling her to help. One can imagine her coming, sullen and unwilling, making no effort to disguise her feelings. She had a task to do, and she meant to dispose of it as grudgingly as possible, and she didn't intend to hide that fact from her father. What did she care? Her father must be out of his mind anyway to want to hear such dull, dry reading in foreign tongues. The English books were just as bad; they were so difficult to comprehend that she didn't even know what they meant. Now, if he would only let her read one of those tales about a dashing, elegant gentleman who had got himself involved in a moment of stolen pleasure, that would be something again; but this classical reading was intolerable, and she couldn't—and wouldn't—bear it.

At last her patience shattered, and she openly revolted.

There are no details of what happened on that eventful day when Mary refused to be of service any longer to her father. Whether there was a scene between father and daughter, or whether Mary obstinately declined to come when called, we do not know. In all likelihood there was a scene, for Mary was at the breaking point and more than ready to loose her pent-up wrath on her defenseless father. No doubt she directed as many insults at him as came to her mind. No doubt she asked what he expected anyway—to make a slave of her? Perhaps he wished her to go
blind, too, with striving to read those horrid Greek and Hebrew volumes. Didn't he know the square Latin form was bad enough without having to read Greek and Hebrew that took such dreadful eye strain? Or perhaps, he wanted her to put her eyes out with that horrid Gothic lettering of the English form—\(^69\) Well, she wasn't going to endure it any longer. She was through!

Milton, blind, and the victim of her rage, sitting in his chair, what of him? Did this man, fearless before the wrath of kings, shrink within himself? Did he lean back, depressed and weary, realizing that without the eyes of others he was powerless to forge ahead? Or did his anger, too, blaze forth? Did he also have words for his "ungrateful" child and answer her charges as hotly as she spoke them. No doubt he said many things. On that day he must have pronounced the letter "r" very hard, for he always attacked it sharply when bitterness or criticism crept into his words.\(^70\)

When Mary was gone and the room was quiet, did he cry within himself:

"In power of other, never in my own,
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half."\(^71\)

\(^69\) Park Lewis, M. D. Manuscript Letters.


\(^71\) Samson Agonistes, 78-79.
DEBORAH, the youngest and the cleverest, was most often his amanuensis.
Deborah had a mind and nature like her father's, and there was a closeness between the two that was lacking with the others. Mary Powell had not been able to influence Deborah as she had the older girls, for she had died at this baby's birth and left the infant daughter to the care of Milton alone. Deborah's early parental impressions came solely from her father.

She was born at the time when Milton was totally blind, and the world lay desolate around him. He found comfort in her presence, and took pleasure in the sound of her little footsteps and the prattling of her baby voice. They both faced a strange world, and together they probably learned to draw upon their own resources and establish a fairly normal mode of living. It did not seem queer to Deborah that her father was blind - she had never known him otherwise. She adjusted herself easily, and he came to depend upon her. She was eyes for him; a guide for his feet, and a faithful little companion.
As the years went by, her sisters often led her into wrongdoing, but her affection for her father never faltered. She always spoke of him as being "delightful company and the life of a conversation."\(^7^2\)

It seems that Deborah was better taught than Mary. It may be that Milton took more pride and interest in her; or it may be that she was quicker to learn than her sister. She, too, read foreign languages without any comprehension of their meaning, but unlike Mary, she pondered what lay back of the words, and she found beauty in the lines. Sixty years afterwards melodious passages from Homer and Ovid still lingered in her memory.\(^7^3\)

Deborah was Milton's chief assistant in the family. He had trained her carefully in reading and taught her to be his amanuensis, and it is to her credit that she never spoke of her work as a hardship. Deborah's hand is more often found in the manuscripts than Mary's, and we know from this that Milton demanded much of her time, and that she must have wearied as Mary did, and found the tasks irksome, but she was evidently able to bear the labor with a greater degree of patience.

\(^7^2\) Hayley, op. cit., Part II, p. 209.

\(^7^3\) Garnett, op. cit., p. 142.
When Mary rebelled, Milton gradually came to the conclusion that he might as well release Deborah, too. It was clear to him how tiresome the girls considered their services, and how futile it was to carry on in the face of so discouraging a situation. He began searching in his mind for something to do about the future of these daughters Mary Powell had left him. He finally arrived at a plan for sending them away from home to learn a trade whereby they might be useful to themselves, since they had failed to be useful to him. So he sent them all—even Anne—to learn the "ingenious manufacture" of embroideries "in gold and silver." It was an expensive venture, but it was the price he had to pay for his own peace of mind, and for the possible good of their future.

Now his house was quiet. At last the peaceful atmosphere he had so long wished for enveloped his household. There was no one with him except his wife, Elizabeth, a single maid servant, and an amanuensis, a man who came in for the day.

How the girls progressed at their trade we don't know. Whether they put it to practical use or wasted their father's money cannot be determined. Deborah went to Ireland as companion to a Mrs. Merien, and may have done work of this sort for the lady. But who can say? We do know that Deborah quit her father's house because she disliked her stepmother, but not because she had any complaint against her father. To

74 Edward Phillips. This account of the life of Milton is published in the volume of Letters of State of Mr. John Milton, printed in 1694.
the day of her death she spoke of him with great tenderness, and if she had entertained in her youth any thoughts that he was too severe, time helped her to understand clearly the high ideals Milton had for his children.

When she was old, and the struggles and hardships of life had left their marks, no doubt she often remembered the quiet evenings in her father's home, and longed for the dear familiar scenes again. It was good to live as orderly a life as he had lived. She remembered how he always rose at five in winter and four in summer; how they always opened the day by reading the Hebrew Scriptures to him, after which he spent time in quiet contemplation. At seven he began his day's work—a man came in, or else she and Mary read or wrote until dinner. He always dictated with his leg thrown over the arm of his chair. This work done, he walked in the garden—she could see him yet. Then he went into the house and played the organ or bass-viol, but most often the organ. Afterwards he went to his study and stayed until six; friends came in until eight, but at nine he picked up his pipe, smoked it, drank a glass of water, and went to bed. It had seemed a simple life to her then, but now she knew that it was a good life.

One time, towards the end of her years, she was shown the crayon portrait of her father by Faithorne, and was swept by a strong emotion at sight of it. "'Tis my dear father,"
she cried in a transport, "I see him, 'tis him!" Then smoothing down her hair she continued, "'Tis the very man, here! Here!"

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In Ireland Deborah met and married Abraham Clarke, a silk weaver in Dublin. Her pretty sister, Anne, though deformed, also married, but little is known of her husband except that he was an architect. Anne married late, at the age of thirty-two, and died in childbirth, her child dying with her. Mary found no husband. Her unpleasant disposition probably proved too great a stumbling block. There is no record of how she got along after learning the gold and silver embroidering; we know only that she died sometime before 1694.

Deborah was the only one who gave Milton any grandchildren, but he did not live to know them. She and her husband moved to London in 1680 and settled in the silk-weaving business at Spitalfields. They had a large family, ten children in all, and were hard put to support them, for the silk-weaving business furnished a very meagre income. It was not until Addison discovered her "bearing the inconveniences of a low fortune with decency and prudence"{76} that Deborah received any relief from her hard existence. He set about trying to establish respectable

{76} Garnett, op. cit., p. 195.
living quarters for her, but died before he accomplished it. However, his work bore fruit. Influential people became interested, and her last days were made comfortable by a donation of fifty guineas from Queen Catherine. The sum was an ill-proportioned one when we consider the great genius of Deborah's father, but it was very welcome to her, nevertheless.

Deborah's children seem to have made little stir in the world. We have records of only two. One son, Caleb, went to Madras in 1703, and died there as Parish Clerk of Saint George's in 1719; and there were a few faint traces of his children as late as 1729, the year of Deborah's death.

The only other one to gain recognition was Mrs. Elizabeth Fowler, Deborah's aged daughter, who was discovered by Dr. Birch and Dr. Newton, two benevolent biographers of Milton, keeping a little chandler's shop in London. She was poor, infirm, and in dire need when they found her. They set about at once to raise money in order to provide her some financial aid, and revived Comus. Even Dr. Johnson, his charity overriding his ill opinion, lent his aid, but hid behind the name of Mr. Lauder, his coadjutor. The poor granddaughter of Milton gained but one hundred fifty pounds from the public benefit, but the amount, small as it was, enabled her to retire with her husband to Islington. She had seven children who died before her, and it is probable that, with her death, the line of Milton became extinct.

77 Hayley, op. cit., II, p. 213.
It was not through Milton's children or his grandchildren that a monument was raised to him. He built one himself through the noble purpose of his life, through his sacrifices, and through the beauty of his works. With the writing of his last great epics he felt he had in the end achieved the work he always believed he was born to do.

He must have thought of all these things in his last days when he sat in the sun outside his door in Bunhill Fields, waiting for death to come. He had been ill a long time from inflammation in his joints, and knew his time was short. Death came late one night on November 8, 1674, from an attack of fever that "the gout struck in." He died "with so little pain or emotion that the tide of his expiring was not perceived by those in the room. And though he had been long troubled with the disease, in so much that his knuckles were all callous, yet was he not ever observed to be very impatient."79

On November 12, his friends and acquaintances, high and low, accompanied his body to the church of St. Giles, near Cripplegate, and saw him laid to rest. After all his years of disappointment, blindness, danger, and solitude, he found peace at last, and could wait for time to bring him fame.

78 Kemble, op. cit., p. 290:7.
79 Loc. cit., p. 290.
His wife, Elizabeth, lived until 1727. She died at Nantwich, where she led the decent existence of a poor but comfortable gentlewoman. When inventory was taken of her effects, there was found to be something above thirty-eight pounds in money, some pictures of her husband, his coat of arms, and two books of *Paradise Lost*.  

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In the church of St. Giles there is an entry in the register book of burials for November 12, which reads: "John Milton, Gentleman, Consumpcon, Chancell."81 The "Consumpcon" which the entry records evidently means a wasting away and a general decay. More important, however, than the record of the malady that seems to have carried Milton away, is the fact that the chronicle tells us the poet's burial place is in the chancel.

For the most part the sixty-six years of Milton's life were turbulent and bitter ones, but they had ended peacefully enough. He had gone to his last sleep with an untroubled mind and a quiet spirit. He was ready for death when it came. He believed that death was no more than a sleep, and that one lay in this state until the day of resurrection. He believed, also, that one was no longer conscious of life's confusions, or that he was aware of time. Time did not exist for the dead. It was

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81 Kemble, op. cit., p. 291.
only a "measure of motion", and in death all motion stopped. One could not longer be disturbed in body or spirit.

This was the belief that Milton took to his grave, and for one hundred years he lay tranquilly in his lead coffin. Time did cease for him, but it did not cease in the bustling town of Cripplegate; and eventually it found the chancel where he lay, and reached a hand into his coffin. The interruption came one Wednesday morning, August 4, 1790, when some workmen began repairs on the church of St. Giles.

It seems that two men, Thomas Strong, the vestry clerk, and John Cole, the churchwarden, were in charge of the renovations. They were at work carrying out their orders when the idea seized upon them to have a look at Milton's coffin. They began to dig, and before long found the casket which they verified, according to the records, as belonging to Milton. As soon as they had satisfied themselves that they had actually found the spot where the poet lay, they left.

That night Mr. Cole had a "merry-meeting" with some friends: "Messrs. Laming and Taylor, Holmes, &c at Fountain's House." Over his cups he told of the discovery. Immediately everyone wanted to see the coffin, so the obliging Mr. Cole arranged

82 Ibid., p. 291.
83 Kemble, op. cit., p. 291.
that on the following morning they should all meet at the church. Next morning everyone was eagerly on hand, and the lead coffin was cut open. No sooner had it been opened that there was a mad scramble for souvenirs.

We are indebted to a man by the name of Phillip Neve, who wrote a small book about the event at the time it happened called: A Narrative of the disinterment of Milton's coffin in the Parish-Church of St. Giles, Cripplegate, on Wednesday, 4th of August, 1790. In this book Mr. Neve says:

Mr Fountain told me, that he pulled hard at the teeth, which resisted, until someone hit them a knock with a stone, when they easily came out. There was but five in the upper jaw, which were all perfectly sound and white, and all taken by Mr Fountain; he gave one of them to Mr Laming; Mr Laming also took one from the lower-jaw; and Mr Taylor took two from it.84

Some of the intruders also took locks of hair, which they distributed among their friends. By this time Elizabeth Grant, the grave digger, heard what was going on, and rushed to the church with the idea of making some money out of the occasion. Mr. Neve continued to relate:

Elizabeth Grant, the grave digger, and who is servant to Mrs Hoppey (the sexton who happened to be away for the day) exhibited the body, at first for 6d. and afterwards for 3d. and 2d. each person. The workmen in the church kept the doors locked to all those who would not pay the price of a pot of beer for entrance, and many, to avoid the payment, got in at a window at the west end of the church, near to Mr Ascough's counting house.85

84 Loc. cit., p. 291.
Next day, however, the grave was filled in, and Milton was left again to lie in peace; and although he suffered the indignities of men during his life and in the grave, yet no one was ever able to touch his magnificent spirit, either living or dead. As Macaulay says in his *Essay on the Life and Works of John Milton*: "Neither blindness, nor gout, nor age, nor penury, nor domestic afflictions, nor political disappointments, nor abuse, nor proscription, nor neglect, had power to disturb his majestic patience." If Macaulay is right, it is, therefore, very probable that Milton's spirit remained serene and untouched by the plundering of his grave.
XIII

The Conclusion

How can one say who was more to blame in their unhappy home life: John Milton, his daughters, or the circumstances that worked against them all?

Surely the optimistic, ambitious, young Milton gave no hint of becoming the cynical, disillusioned individual that his family knew. Naturally, he himself had no idea of developing into such a bitter man, but life grew hard, and he was unprepared to meet its "slings and arrows." His sensitive nature recoiled against life's blows, and, in recoiling, he struck back in a fierce, helpless effort to avoid the buffets. He was trained neither by rearing nor nature to meet them. His family had nurtured his every poetic desire, surrounded him with every cultural advantage, and shielded him from all that was gross and ugly. They considered him a young marvel, and brought him up deliberately to be a man of genius.86

He early developed a colossal pride that has caused many a biographer to call him an egotist; and perhaps he was. Yet Milton was never smug or self-satisfied. He respected the fact that all men were individuals and, as such, had a right to their own opinions. He fought for his beliefs, and conceded others the privilege of doing the same.

The two basic traits of his character were his deep sensitiveness, and a certain moral intractableness. The latter trait is probably the foundation for the conception that Milton, as a rigid Puritan, was upright, but not very lovable, warm, or human. There is an element of truth in this impression, yet the statement is not altogether correct. Of course, he was a Puritan. How could he be otherwise? He lived in a Puritan age and believed in its standards. He turned to Puritanism, no doubt, because it embodied his favorite virtues of fortitude and temperance, and because it was the only force in his time that gave promise of overthrowing the old order and of bringing about a realization of his ideals. Morality was fundamental with him, and he possessed an intense religious feeling. This feeling, however was not a passion which ran as deep as seems at first sight. There was really very little religious fury in his nature. He neither founded nor followed

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any sect, but directed his violence against form and dogma. He was, therefore, not a fanatic, but an intellectual fighting for liberty of thought.

This trait seems to have been characteristic of Milton's family. His grandfather, Richard Milton, was a Catholic, but we learn that he was fined sixty pounds - not once, but twice - for not attending church for more than three months.\textsuperscript{88} His son, Milton's father, decided to become a Protestant and was promptly turned out of his home and disinherited, whereupon he went to London and proceeded to make his own fortune. Both the grandfather and the father of the poet show the same intractableness of conscience as Milton himself; and we see this intractableness running through all phases of Milton's public and private life.

He was unyielding in his attitude toward physical passion. He was determined to remain chaste, but his determination was based not on religious scruples, but on an instinct of purity that dwelt within him, and, also, upon a delicacy of pride which would not let him contaminate his body and soul.\textsuperscript{89} He had a conviction that, in order to acquire supernatural powers, he must remain chaste; and, since he had dedicated his life to the

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p. 3.

highest literary form, he would stand firmly by his conviction. Considering some of the basic qualities which Milton possessed, it is logical that he should take this attitude. He hated compromise when an ideal was at stake; he believed in clear, hard domination of intelligence over passion; he had his pride; and he took his genius too seriously to allow the flesh to rule. He held all amorous tendencies well in check, and obedient to his will.

He took for granted that this philosophy, which he had adopted, was infallible, and there was good reason for his attitude. In his father's home, the interests and ideals of the family had revolved around him. He "never clearly perceived that the world was not made up of Miltons."\textsuperscript{90} His peculiar pride and his egotism were to be identified with something great. His superior powers must be used to advantage, and he felt that others could use their powers the same as he, if they put forth the effort. It was only natural, therefore, that he expected more of his children in every way than they were able to achieve.

Milton carried this attitude through life until he came to the time of his marriage. Then he suddenly learned two facts: the strength of passion within himself, and the legitimacy of passion. He was carried away by an overwhelming

physical urge when he married Mary Powell. He was not attracted by her wit or nature, but was drawn to her by his great need. However, he met a shock at this first entrance into a life of passion, which did much to embitter his nature. Mary refused herself to him. ⁹¹ His pride was hurt, his egotism sorely wounded, and, as a result, he became fiercely vindictive. He suffered, yet in the end he forgave and took her back; and in so doing he made a compromise that lowered his ideal of human nature. He accepted Mary on purely wifely terms and let it go at that; he did not try to elevate her. Had Mary been of malleable character, Milton would probably have lived his married life with her in some sort of rosy illusion; or had he understood her true character, the generosity of his nature would then have kept him from owning his wife's inferiority even to himself. Milton was indeed generous. We have proof of that in the many good friendships he possessed. He never lacked for friends, and all his friends stood by him through tribulation and danger. He had the estimable quality of seeing the other person's point of view and of respecting it. He had the ability of keeping on good terms with people of both parties without perjuring himself, and it can be truthfully said that he never lost a friend, but acquired more and more as he grew in years. ⁹²

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A man of such a generous nature, therefore, could be depended on to adjust himself to marriage. Why then was Milton's a failure, and why did it warp his attitude toward life? The answer lies in the fact that when Mary refused herself, neither his pride nor his ideal of purity could endure the shock. His highest ideal, that of love as a harmony between body and spirit, crashed about him and lay shattered and soiled. He had nothing left except the burning impulse of his flesh. He felt degraded; his wrath mounted, and he carried an anger against the flesh throughout his life. He had said again and again in his pamphlets that a unity of the flesh without a unity of spirit was nothing more than base sensuality. Now his disillusion was complete. He lost faith in woman, and he lost some of the faith he had in himself.93

He and Mary lived together as man and wife, but they had little, or no, companionship. This lack prevented harmony and understanding in their home. Instead of father and daughters growing closer together, they drifted apart. Mary Powell was no help at all. Through her the children learned, at a very early age, to be hostile and disrespectful to their father; and Milton with his sensitive nature, his firm convictions, and his high ideals was unable to make an adjustment. No wonder Milton became uncongenial, irritable, and hard to live with.

There was another reason why Milton became so rebellious toward life, and so difficult in his home. That reason was blindness. It was the greatest of all his trials to bear. Loss of sight is a disastrous affliction for anyone, but for Milton it spelled tragedy. It meant the finish of his literary hopes and dreams. It was the final, annihilating blow, and from then on he was a "soul driven by despair beyond despair."\(^{94}\) His reaction to everyone about him, as well as to the world in general, was one of greater cynicism, distrust, and disillusionment. Poetry was driven from his thoughts; he made no effort to compose any literary piece, or have any set on paper. His enemies said that his blindness was exactly what he deserved; that it was a curse sent upon him for writing so many wicked things against the king, and for going against the Bible in his pamphlets on divorce. He grew sharp and antagonistic, and,

\(^{94}\) Kemble, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 263.
since he was forced to spend most of his time at home, his ill-temper was keenly felt by the members of his own family.

How long Milton would have remained in this attitude one cannot say, but fate suddenly took a hand, and he was forced into activity again when Cromwell came into power and established his Commonwealth. Soon Milton was turning out a tremendous amount of prose—fierce, caustic prose that kept his thoughts steeped in bitterness. The man, whom his family knew, was not the man he was born to be, or ever wished to be.

His daughters found him aloof and unapproachable. They did not know how heavily blindness weighed upon his spirit, or how filled with frustrations his life was, and had been. They did not know that a sublime poet slumbered in his soul; or that his nature was one of highest integrity and deep sensitiveness. They knew only that he was ill-tempered and severe. As we have seen, they struck back whenever opportunity offered, and they grew unkind, undutiful, and deceitful. All this was a hard blow to Milton; he grew sterner and more unyielding than ever. He commanded, but he did not reason. The gulf grew wider, and he made no effort to bridge it. He had lost his faith in too many things; so what was the use!

Always a lonely man, he grew lonelier and came to feel he was completely shut out from the natural, normal world he loved, and that he was hemmed in by the dark, dead world of his blindness. He needed the companionship of his daughters, and
they needed his companionship, but neither the father nor daughters could find footing on common ground.

When it came to teaching them, Milton did so with one aim in mind: to make them useful. He did not trouble to teach them comprehension; but who can say? Perhaps his daughters did not care to comprehend.

Milton probably never understood in what way he was to blame in the unhappy home life, and I doubt that the girls understood wherein they were at fault. If their father had been spared his eyes, he might have been tolerant and kindly; or if there had been love between John Milton and Mary Powell, there might have been happiness in the home; or if their mother had instilled sympathy and respect into their nature, they might have had consideration for their father.

Perhaps in after times they all looked back and pondered the sad years, and perhaps each cried out in his heart, "If I had only understood, I would have done differently."

Milton's life, for the most part, was one of disappointment and sorrow, but compensation came to him; for time made his name immortal. His daughters' lives, likewise, were unhappy and troubled, but time brought them no compensation. The only possible claim they can make to immortality is that they are the daughters of John Milton.