

PARADISE LOST AS A POEM OF
CONSOLATION

by

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PARADISE LOST AS A POEM OF CONSOLATION

Introduction

Since Adam, the first man, cried out,

Why am I mockt with death, and length'ned out
To deathless pain?¹

man has been trying to rationalize his painful existence here on earth in the light of a just and loving God. Because everyone in all ages has been subject to the evils and discomforts of life since the fall of Adam and Eve, the chief concern of mortals throughout the centuries has been to find happiness and contentment in the midst of life's inevitable miseries. The universal cry of the human race has been, "Why? Why does God permit evils to afflict men and the guiltless to suffer? Why is man born to adversity, and then after all his labor and travail, why does he have to face his chief enemy, Death? If the power of Heaven is so absolute, why should so much distress exist in the world?" Many times it has seemed to man that his are "the problems of the human being who must live in a world created

1

"Paradise Lost," The Works of John Milton, ed. F. A. Patterson, et al (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), X, 774-775; all references to Milton are taken from the Columbia edition.

and operated without much apparent regard for his happiness."² To alleviate the unavoidable ills of life, the pagan instituted a philosophy of appeasement of the gods in various ways, but it was the privilege of Christianity to give meaning to life's problems. In accordance with the Christian's philosophy of a Divine Providence ruling over the affairs of life, this study is an attempt to analyze Milton's theological theme to

. . . assert Eternal Providence,³
And justify the wayes of God to men.

This thesis purposes to trace the means of comfort and consolation derived from the paradox of the fortunate Fall in John Milton's poem, Paradise Lost. Involved are a consideration of the background for man's extremity and dire need of comfort as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve, a historical background of Milton's milieu with emphasis upon the aesthetic application and moral impact of the poem, and a study of the structure and analysis of the

2

A. D. Beach Langston, Tudor Books of Consolation (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1940), p. 17; hereafter cited as Langston, Tudor Books of Consolation.

3

Paradise Lost, I, 25-26.

poem with emphasis upon the consolation derived from Milton's religious interpretation of the account of Adam and Eve's transgression.

Man's Extremity

Dire Need of Consolation

In the poem Paradise Lost, an epic of the creation and fall of man, are found the causes of all the evils and distresses which have come upon man in this life. A curse was pronounced upon man as a result of Lucifer's seduction of Eve. At the outset of the temptation, Satan by flattery and deception persuaded Eve that the fruit on the forbidden tree would make her a Deity. He urged the tyranny and envy of God, declared that he himself had tasted the fruit, and described the enlightenment he had felt as a result. The fruit itself was rarely attractive; and, being tempted both by Satan and the fragrant apple, frail woman succumbed. Earth shuddered and nature sighed, but undeterred, Eve

Greedily . . . ingorged without restraint,
And knew not eating death.⁴

The prime result of this act is obvious. Sin had entered and man had fallen. The penalty from that day forth has

⁴ Paradise Lost, IX, 291-292.

been "Endless miserie from this day onward . . . to per-
 petuitie,"⁵ and "All mankind, for one mans fault . . . con-
 demn'd."⁶ The curse now fell upon the Serpent, who should
 upon his belly go grovelling all his life and whose seed
 should experience perpetual enmity with that of Woman; upon
 Woman, who should bring forth children in sorrow and who
 should henceforth submit to her husband's rule; and upon
 Man, for whose sake the ground should be cursed. Further-
 more, Death from Sin no power could from this time forth
 separate, and the world was so altered that the plan for
 eternal spring was supplanted:

(With) pinching cold and scorching heate . . .
 Vapour, and Mist, and Exhalation hot,
 Corrupt and Pestilent: Now from the North
 Of Norumbega, and the Samoed shoar,
 Bursting thir brazen Dungeon, armd with ice,
 And snow, and haile and stormie gust and flaw,
 Boreas and Caecias and Argestes loud
 And Thrascias rend the Woods and Seas upturn.⁷

After Sin, Death, and inclement weather marched famine,
 sickness, madness and war, together with all the physical
 evils which long have tested both animal and man. Coupled
 with these outward manifestations of divine wrath were the

⁵ Paradise Lost, X, 810-811.

⁶ Ibid., X, 822-824.

⁷ Ibid., X, 691; 694-700.

inner conflicts transmitted by Eve. As a result of her initial temptation, there followed her disturbed state of mind and Adam's digressive lecture on psychology.⁸ After the Fall, Eve initiated the substitution of rationalization for reason, and "In the conventional statement of Philo,⁹ 'reason is henceforth ensnared,' and 'becomes a slave.'" Their lustful cohabitation led to intense sorrow, loss of desire to live or contemplation of suicide, heated quarrels, and self-recrimination. Following closely upon these sorrows came all the evils with which the earth since has been cursed.

Although John Milton in his poem Paradise Lost is unable to provide a way of escape for man in his dilemma, the poet does attempt to point him to a better way to endure the ills of the life he must live. The title, Paradise Lost, would seem to indicate that with the fall of Adam and Eve, Milton was devoid of hope for the human race. With Paradise actually gone, what hope would there be for man in his miserable state? Paradoxically, the poet teaches that

8

Grant McColley, Paradise Lost (Chicago: Packard and Company, 1940), p. 166; hereafter cited as McColley, Paradise Lost.

9

Ibid., p. 178.

the thread of God's plan runs definitely through the entire story of the creation and fall of man; that sorrows and sufferings, rather than to be endured, are to be welcomed in God's scheme of things; and that man, in order best to fulfill his mission creditably on earth, must become submissive in all phases of his life to the whole will of God. Much consolation is to be derived from the fact that according to the Divine plan, there is aim and purpose in the lives of human beings on this earth, even in the midst of all their torments and distresses. Though able to see only a step at a time, man is following a clearly marked path and is destined to attain his desired end in God's good time.

In defending a Divine Providence, Milton was pursuing a philosophy that men through the centuries have found of universal interest. This belief was clearly summed up in the introduction to Epictetus:

The conviction that the universe is wholly governed by an all-wise, divine Providence is for him (man) one of the principal supports of the doctrine of values. All things, even apparent evils, are the will of God, comprehended in his universal plan, and therefore good from the point of view of the whole. It is our moral duty to elevate ourselves to this conception, to see things as God sees them. The man who reconciles his will to the will of God, and so recognizes that every event is necessary and reasonable for the best interest of the whole, feels no discontent with anything outside the control of his free will. His happiness he finds in filling

the role which God has assigned him, becoming thereby a voluntary co-worker with God, and in filling this role no man can hinder him.¹⁰

Boethius, an ancient Roman philosopher who was another precursor of Milton, was in a special position to appreciate Divine guidance in whatever happens to men. In his affliction he sought and found solace "that man, although he is a free moral agent, is none the less watched over by the all-seeing eye and guided by the omnipotent hand."¹¹ He also contended that although no man is allowed to know all that God has purposed, it is sufficient for him to know that the Creator and Ruler governs all things, has rightly fashioned all that He has created, and has never wrought any evil work yet.¹² To understand just how adversity can be turned to good account, then, is to comprehend how Divine Providence actually works and to see behind the forces struggling in the lives of people.

¹⁰

W. A. Oldfather, Epictetus; The Discourses as Reported by Arrian. The Manual, and Fragments, Vol. I (London: William Heinemann, 1926-1928). Introd. xxiii.

¹¹

Bernard L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1917), p. 47; hereafter cited as Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius.

¹²

Ibid., p. 170.

When Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden, the humbled pair entered upon a new life of character building impossible for them to achieve in their former state. Now, with both good and evil before them, they were constrained to make their own decisions. Sedgefield expresses the idea of freedom of choice in this way: "He beholdeth all our works, both good and evil, before they come to pass, before even they arise in thought; but He doth not any the more constrain us so that we are obliged to do good, nor hinder us from doing wrong, for He hath given us freedom."¹³ It seems somewhat paradoxical that they were so utterly dependent upon the providence of God and at the same time so entirely thrown upon their own resources in making proper evaluations and right choices. Seemingly at variance with each other, yet the two moral obligations placed upon the pair were in perfect harmony. God created man in His own image and for His own glory; therefore, He required in man the excellency of Christian virtues that would be in harmony with His own goodness. Although God had a plan for their lives, a part of His plan was to use no coercion in

13

Walter John Sedgefield, King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1900), p. 157; hereafter cited as Sedgefield, King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius.

obtaining His purpose in the lives of mortal men. In order for them to attain a spiritual affinity with their Creator, they had to become through the means of the exercise of their own free wills capable of possessing the essence of good in their own characters. Through good choices, they could bring good to themselves and to others; but through bad choices, they could bring tremendous consequences of evil upon themselves and upon others. Although man was given the power to choose his acts, he was incapable of controlling the results of his behavior but had to profit or suffer by the consequences. In Areopagitica Milton explicitly stated the matter of the freedom of man to make his own choices:

. . . many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgresse, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We our selves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force; God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he creat passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of virtu? . . . This justifies the high providence of God, who though He command us temperance, justice, continence, yet powrs out before us ev'n to a profusenes, all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond

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all limit and satiety.

It was to man's advantage, then, willingly to accept the divine guidance proffered him; however, even with right choices, man still had to cope with afflictions and evils that come with the Fall. Just how adversity can be turned to good account is the next aspect of the subject for consideration.

Bearableness of Life Through Consolation

Milton, as well as many other writers, dwelt upon the idea that the Fall had "not only been over-ruled for good by the divine beneficence, but had been the indispensable means to the attainment of far greater good for man and---if it may be so put---for God than would have been possible without it."¹⁵ Boethius in his affliction found consolation in the greatness and goodness of God. He felt that if men have a true conception of God, a conception unobscured by worldly desires, riches, fame, and power, a

14
The Works of John Milton, Vol. IV (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 319-320.

15
Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," ELH, IV (1937), p. 169.

conception commensurable with God's greatness, they may see
 that even adversity is a blessing;¹⁶ consequently, men should flee the sinking sands of ease and seek difficult places:

Who with an heedful care
 Will an eternal seat prepare,
 Which cannot be down cast
 By force of windy blast,
 And will the floods despise,
 When threatening billows do arise,
 He not on hills must stand,
 Nor on the dangerous sinking sand.
 For there the winds will threat,
 And him with furious tempests beat,
 And here the ground too weak
 Will with the heavy burden break.
 Fly then the dangerous ease
 Of an untried delightful place,
 And thy poor house bestow
 In stony places firm and low
 For though the winds do sound,
 And waves of troubled seas confound:
 Yet thou to rest disposed
 In thy safe lowly vale inclosed,
 Mayst live a quiet age,¹⁷
 Scorning the air's distempered rage.

Boethius maintained that adversity is even more profitable than prosperity. His reasons for this belief are found in the fact that prosperity is false and deludes men to

16

Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius, p. 47.

17

Hugh F. Stewart, and E. K. Rand, trans., Boethius, the Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 195.

believe that in pleasure is found true happiness. The substance of his beliefs is stated thus:

Adversity, however, provides the real happiness, though people may not think so; for she is steadfast, and her promises always come true. Prosperity is false, and betrays all her friends, for by her changefulness she shows forth her fickleness, but Adversity betters and teaches all those to whom she joins herself. Again, Prosperity takes captive the minds of all them that enjoy her with her cozening pretense that she is good, while Adversity unbinds and sets free those who are subject to her, by revealing to them how perishable this present happiness is.¹⁸

Langston in his research also found that there is no place for chance or fortune in God's scheme of the universe, but that afflictions are sent by God and are profitable to men as a special and necessary gift of God to those whom He loves. Although God loved His Son above all others, yet He sent His Son greater tribulations than He has to any other man; therefore, Christ, who was God as well as man, had to endure great afflictions; but by His suffering, He received more glory than He could have got in any other way. Consequently, it is better that man should suffer the very least of the pains that Christ suffered on the cross than that he should possess all the wealth and the glory

18

Sedgefield, King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius, p. 49.

that the world affords.¹⁹ God is a loving Father and will impose upon man no more than is necessary for his good. In His loving treatment of His children and His efforts to bring about their ultimate good, He may, as Langston further affirms, be likened to any of our earthly friends:

God may be compared to a father or a mother, to a schoolmaster who chastises his pupils that they may become more proficient, to a physician who cuts that he may heal, to a husbandman who tills his fields with a sharp plow that they may bear the best fruit, or to a goldsmith who puts his gold in the furnace that he may refine it. Troubles are profitable to the faithful man in that they help him to know better both himself and God, in that through exercising him they increase his faith, in that they give him reason to pray to God more often, in that they increase his godliness and virtue, in that they teach him patience, meekness, compassion, strength and temperance, in that they teach him to contemn the world, in that they yield him great joy once he has overcome them, and finally in that they store up for him rewards in heaven.²⁰

Langston continued the line of thought in quoting from St. Augustine that experience of tribulation teaches patience, patience reinforces faith, and faith in turn gives comfort. Tribulation, if patiently borne, teaches man to know himself for the sinner that he is; and only by realizing his lost condition can man have his sin purged away as fire purges dross from pure gold. Everybody has to suffer tribu-

¹⁹

Langston, Tudor Books of Consolation, p. 17.

²⁰

Ibid., pp. 353-354.

lation on earth for the health of his soul; only in God is there perfect peace. The result is that in greatest tribulation is man nearest to God.

In still another citation, this time from De Mortalitate by St. Cyprian, Langston gave further proof of the good that may be effected through affliction:

. . . tribulation is only approving and testing of the strength of a man's faith . . . And for those who endured in the spirit of Christ there is the reward of an eternal life in heaven . . . let us not fear death, but let us remember that we are but strangers in this world.²¹

Finally, G. Cardano, whose Comforte was a highly influential consolation both of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had much to say about the necessity and justness of tribulations and adversity:

... . none are admitted to heauenly ioyes, but those that in all good lyfe and perfection do deserue the same: for as gold is fyned in the fornace so the life of a just man, by aduersity in this world is tryed. . . S. Paule therefore sayed that al we suffer in this worlde was meritorious enough to gayne the glory of ^{the} Worlde to come, who so euer then that fymely embraceth thys favthe, should he not in aduersyty rejoyce & in prosperiteye lament? And amids his miseries persuade himselfe that god doth make tryal of hys fayth, after tryall to cal him among the number chosen?

21

Langston, Tudor Books of Consolation, p. 76.

If in getting worldly glory thou doest so much re-
 joice, the reward thereof being final, the continu-
 ance short and mortal: what should we do for this
 heauenly glory, which is euerlasting, great, & as-
 sured. . . who would not change this short life with
 that euerlasting? this frayl with that fyrme? this
 unhappy with that most happy this troublesome, with
 that most quiet? but in wante of beleefe is synne,
 and in synne is wante of beliefe: whereby the con-
 dicion of man if berefte bothe of hope and faith,
 for what can be unto man either more profytable
 after deathe, or more to be wished in this life then
 the hope of the life to come? And though ^{thy} same
 were not, yet ought a man no whit to be discouraged,
 because there is almost no mystery so great but
 may be converted to better hap. Neyther is there
 among mortal men any opinion so assured, as that
 nothing is sure. For as aduersity and misfortune
 hath bene to some men a way to good chaunce: So
 hath prosperity bene to others the occasion of
 miserye.²²

To point the way in which adversity may be turned to good
 account, he used

. . . the history of Iob, therby in one example to
 shew the varietye of fortune which th Gentiles by
 dyuers examples were taught to believe. For Iob
 being first happy, hauing health, children, abundance,
 land, possession, & cattel, was bereft of all hys
 worldly goodes, & such as in prosperity were his
 greatest frends, became in aduersity his most cruell
 foes, yet afterwardes in more abundance then be-
 fore, he receyued the goodness and liberalitye of
 fortune. Such and so many be the occasions, both
 of good and euil fortune, as nothing is more incer-
 taine.²³

22

Cardano, Cardanus Comfort (1573), First Booke,
 AVIv; hereafter cited as Cardano, Cardanus Comfort.

23

Ibid., First Booke, AVI.

In spite of the fact that many Christian philosophers recommend an acceptance of adversity as a means of attaining felicity, the strongest instinct in man is to seek release from affliction and adversity. Since it is evident that there is no complete escape from all the evils and tribulation that the Fall brought into existence, man's constant search has been for the best means of making life bearable in the midst of the inevitable ills. His sources of relief are derived chiefly either in freedom from fear or in a search for pleasure in the things of this world; namely, in riches, in power, in fame, or in some other form of worldly attainment.

In his search for release from fear, man has through the ages been making use of all the means at his disposal. Chiefly through research and through experimentation has he succeeded in raising the standards of society and in making this life more bearable. Even so, man is in constant dread of what the future holds for him. Some of these worries are fear of pain; fear of distress and grief; fear of hardships; fear of ill health and disease; fear of perturbations of the mind, such as envy, jealousy, compassion, vexation, dependency, despondency, and grief; fear of old age; and, finally, fear of death. Science has performed a wonderful part in alleviating pain. Through the study of medicine and through the knowledge of

preventive measures, much of the physical suffering that was once thought a necessary part of life has been removed. In the same way, ill health and disease, old age and death, have received their share of relief. Yet, although many diseases have been successfully combatted and a greater longevity of life has been achieved, eventually each individual is forced to pay the penalty of Adam and Eve's transgression through old age and death. Nor is the human entirely free from each of the other fears. Increased knowledge and higher standards of living have failed to bring the remedy for adverse fortune, vexation, sadness, loss of friends, sickness, and bodily pain. Nor have wars and consequent suffering ceased as a result of man's wisdom and experience. Consolation from these ills is derived chiefly from the consciousness of the brevity of existence here on earth. Consensus of opinion among religious thinkers is that since life is but a pilgrimage to eternity, it is better to suffer brief pain on earth than everlasting pains in hell. The dread with which man usually looks upon the end of this pilgrimage calls for a discussion of the bearableness of death.

When Adam first looked upon death, he was horrified that there should exist

. . . many shapes
Of Death, and many are the wayes that lead
To his grim Cave.²⁴

Nor have its terrors decreased with time. The Christian philosophy offers refuge in the fact that death should cause no fear on the part of the believer. Cardano takes the extreme view that of all things that happen in man's life, sorrow and death are the best. Death, in his opinion, is neither evil nor lamentable, for why should one bewail or fear his own departing from a life which neither pity nor mercy can prevent? Death removes sickness and all other griefs. Although death is always close by, it comes to each individual only once and usually comes with such ease that it may be likened to a quiet sleep. Death is the end of evil to fools and to wise men the beginning of all good. Seeing that the soul never dies, but instead leaves behind its troubles and partakes of heavenly joys, why should man not account this a change good and most delectable? Finally, since the soul, being burdened with the body and its cares, is never free to understand all things, man should consider that death is merely a release of the soul from prison.²⁵

²⁴ Paradise Lost, XI, 467-469.

²⁵ Cardanus Comfort, Second Booke, CVIII; DI; DII; DIII.

In the freeing of the soul from the bondage of the body, De Unamuno follows the same pattern of reasoning:

The visible universe, the universe that is created by the instinct of self-preservation, becomes all too narrow for me. It is like a cramped cell, against the bars of which my soul beats its wings in vain. Its lack of air stifles me. More, more, and always more! . . . Eternity, eternity!---that is the supreme desire! ²⁶

De Unamuno further expresses a feeling of consolation in the immortality of the soul:

We must needs believe in the other life, in the eternal life beyond the grave, and in an individual and personal life . . . we must needs believe in that other life, perhaps, in order that we may deserve it, in order that we may obtain it, for it may be that he neither deserves it nor will obtain it who does not passionately desire it above reason and, if need be, against reason . . . above all, we must feel and act as if an endless continuation of our earthly life awaited us after death. ²⁷

Langston's study also offers excellent comfort to man in his attitude toward death:

Physical death, originating in Adam's sin and to be suffered as expiation of our own sins, is not

²⁶

Miguel De Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples (London: Macmillan and Company, 1921), pp. 38-39; hereafter cited as De Unamuno, The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples.

²⁷

Ibid., pp. 258-259.

the terrible thing it seems; it is nothing but separation of soul and body and entrance of the soul into heaven. It is the eternal spiritual death of the soul in hell that is to be feared; but Christ, by his life, his death, his descent into hell, and his resurrection has overcome for us sin, Satan, and death . . .²⁸ heaven is the reward of those who believe on Christ, and all believers should rejoice at a death which frees them from the miseries of the temporal world.²⁹

The discussion now centers around man's problem of seeking to make life more bearable through worldly prosperity, power, and fame.

Nothing, Cardan says, is more certain than the uncertainty of fortune.³⁰ Man spends his days working for gold and silver, and then to his sorrow he finds that he is beguiled by the deceitfulness of riches. In the first place, care of them leads to trouble and even to danger. In the second place, riches in themselves, the mere fact of possession, does not make a man any happier. He may own fine clothes and precious gems, but they in no way add to man's merit. He shines from his own virtue, and his possessions do not confer their properties upon him. He is one thing; they are another. The accident of possession counts for

²⁸

Langston, Tudor Books of Consolation, p. 163.

²⁹

Ibid., p. 148.

³⁰

Ibid., quoted from, p. 397.

nothing. One should be content with little things such as are sufficient to satisfy the demands of nature, and should know and appreciate himself, for inner worth counts most. Moreover, the acquisition of wealth fails to gain for man the honor, respect, virtue, and friends which it is purported to, for these things belong to the money, not to the man. William Bullein goes even farther in his condemnation of wealth:

Gold is the prince of euill, the shortner of tyme, the waster and consumer of vertue, loue, liberality, reste, peace, and quietness, the instrument of treason, warse, theeft, horedome slaughter, bloodshedyng, and perilous pariuorie, this wretched money should not thus be abused of the Christians. . .³²

Man's greatest comfort against the blows of a capricious fortune is to realize that he cannot take with him from this earth anything more than he brought into the world, that wealth hinders and hampers those men who are seeking the glories of eternity, and that the gifts of fickle fortune are essentially worthless in comparison with the

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Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius, p. 92.

³²

Quoted by Myrtis Tureman Kurz, Health Books of Renaissance England (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1944), p. 209; hereafter cited as Kurz, Health Books of Renaissance England.

33

abiding wealth of the world hereafter.³³ Much the same can be said of the emptiness of the possession of power, honor, glory, and independence.

Although power in this world often comes to very good men to the intent that the might of the wicked be destroyed, more often it brings affliction or evil. Cardano says that kings whom men in their imagination think to be gods are also followed with affliction. Their palaces are ever open to great evils, such as envy, hate, grudge, poison, and persecution; furthermore, the minds of princes are so beset by trouble that they are suffered neither to sleep by night nor to rest by day. They are constantly assailed by the memory of wickedness, the suspicion of familiars, the mistrust of people, and the fear of other princes, regardless of whether they are wicked rulers or are just and holy in their reign. If the ruler, into whose hands the power falls, be wicked, as was Nero, then is the power indeed to be regretted.³⁴ As for glory and honor, men who desire fame and drink greedily of

33

Sedgefield, King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius, p. 77.

34

Cardano, Cardanus Comfort, First Booke, p. BIII.

the praise of other men, according to Boethius, are like mortals who have built their houses on hills of sand. As the rain washes away the sand and the houses fall, so is the thirst of the craving after their own honor never satisfied.³⁵ Since all creatures have come from one father and one mother, it is vain for a person to seek praise of his fellow men. Even if men are deserving of honor, they must hold themselves of little account and be concerned for true virtue and goodness within themselves rather than the applause of their fellow men. Furthermore, a man who would be in high repute must humbly crave the help of those in a position to aid him achieve his desires, and even then he can hardly expect the good opinion of all men at all times. Glory free from care can a man never have, for there will always be something to thwart and fret him. Finally, as the philosopher has summed up the matter, to God rightly belongs the honor and glory:

Every creature is to be honoured in its due degree,
and the highest is ever to be honoured most; therefore the divine power should be honoured and

A.D.

35

Sedgefield, King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius, p. 186.

admired and esteemed above all other things.³⁶

feel:

If it is independence that man seeks, it is even more evident that he will only fail to achieve his desired end, for no man lives or dies unto himself. For awhile man may feel that he is sufficient in himself, but sooner or later he is forced to seek or accept aid from other mortals. How much more will he find himself in need of the help of the One who is able when all human succor fails! The old adage, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," is more than just a saying; it is a truth that man will do well to consider. If all these carnal pleasures, then, are unworthy the aspirations of man, how much better is it for him to put his trust in eternal power, honor, glory, and independence! Man is more precious in the sight of God than all his possessions, and if that be so, then of how much more value is the soul of man than the body.

When Adam and Eve entered upon their new life, an even more complex aspect of man's living than has been discussed in this study so far was intimated. In the face of such hindrances to happiness as their sin had brought

36

Sedgefield, King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius, p. 79.

upon them, the pair and their future progeny were indeed to feel the effects of the storm and tumults, conflict and toil, that the curse had inflicted. These outward circumstances, however, were to be no greater than the problem of the mastery of their individual internal selves. If a degree of happiness and contentment were to be achieved in their afflictions, it would have to be found first of all in the inner man. To stay in the will of God would necessitate the exercise of will power, no less than the development of the faculty of clear reasoning rather than that of rationalisation, which had been initiated by Eve in the Garden of Eden. The matter of the care of their temporal bodies would require the will to temperate living and moderation. Even in participating in legitimate activities, man would need self-control lest he reach the point of excessiveness and satiation. To develop spiritual resistance against the onslaughts of Fortune, as well as to find consolation for all the thousand natural shocks to which flesh fell heir, human beings now had to develop a high inner worth.

Adam and Eve themselves attained a degree of strength sufficient to fortify them in their first entrance into their new habitation. Although having yielded to the first temptations, they had later succeeded in resisting Satan's temptations to suicide, had gained the

mastery over their own petty quarrels, and had admitted their guilt and accepted God's divine decree as their just desprt. The subdued yet strengthened pair gained a measure of respect as they became fortified with higher inner ideals.

From experience, Milton was acquainted with the subject of the control of the will. As a Puritan, he had to keep his will under subjection; and as an author working under a physical handicap, he had to maintain rigid study habits. Not the least of his ability to assert the predominance of his will was his undeviating devotion to the task that he had set himself of developing such a theme as that found in Paradise Lost. The quality of his work indicates that linked with his spiritual stamina was his ability to think clearly. The use of reason makes it possible for man to analyze true motives correctly, to approach life's problems with sureness, and to have a proper perspective of life's values. By the exercise of the will and the right use of reason is generated temperance, another indication of the inner worth of man. Milton himself pledged devotion to abstemious living and a high austerity. He was regular in his habits, "waking early (as is the use of temperate men)"³⁷ to meditate before

37

McColley, Paradise Lost, p. 340.

continuing a strict procedure for the duties of each day. In the poem Paradise Lost he teaches the relationship between moderation and longevity of life:

There is . . . if thou well observe
The rule of not too much, by temperance taught
In what thou eat'st and drink'st, seeking
 from thence
Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight,
Till many years over thy head return.³⁸

Kurz in her research observes that "a man who disregards temperance and overeats or overworks must be treated as a drunk man."³⁹ Another author makes the following observation about the ill effects of intemperance:

Degenerative diseases are due to the fact that civilized human beings do not, on any level of their being, live in harmony with Tao, or the divine Nature of Things. They love to intensify their self-hood through gluttony, therefore eat the wrong food and too much of it . . . Among the consequences . . . are degenerative changes in particular organs, such as the heart, kidneys, pancreas, intestines and arteries.⁴⁰

Long before Huxley had brooded upon the folly of

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Paradise Lost, XI, 530-534.

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Kurz, Health Books of Renaissance England, p. 100.

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Aldous Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1945), pp. 229-230.

intemperance in his day, Cardano had condemned his own age for its want of restraint:

th

What is Y cause that philosophers and hermits have liued so verye long? & yet they to great abstinenſe and earnest contemplacion hindered their health? Unless it were because they liued voide of care and temperatly. How much were this rule of lyuinge to attaine long life more delicate, then to feede uppen fleshe and honye? But in this life me continue carefully in labours and care, watching the halfe night basking in Venus bathe, abyding in cloudye regions, and not in good ayre, & drinkinge boyled wynes: do notwithstandinge complaine of short life.⁴¹

Whether or not men today would agree wholeheartedly with Cardano's interpretation of the meaning of intemperance is doubtful, but almost all men would concur in the opinion that man who wishes to avoid as many evils of life as possible must certainly shun practices of intemperance which bring upon himself afflictions not born of necessity. Although it is the quality of life rather than the length in years that counts, yet it is an indication of internal virtue and strength when man practices temperate living. Boethius emphasized the importance of self-control when he said:

Though . . . a man be sole master
How is his might any the more,

41

Cardano, Cardanus Comfort, Second Booke, pp. E-EIIv.

If of himself control he hath not,
 Nor of his thoughts, nor thoroughly strive
 Well to beware in word and in deed
 Of all the sins . . .⁴²

Man's part in subjugating his own inclinations and bringing about right relations between himself and God is perhaps the greatest task with which he has been charged. In his own strength alone he would surely fail. Milton admits that "Man the moral part (cannot) perform, and not performing cannot live,"⁴³ until "God with Man unites."⁴⁴ When man performs his part by obeying and having faith, then Christ does the rest, and complete inner victory is assured. God has such delight in men that he "voutsafes among them to set up his Tabernacle, the Holy One with mortal Men to dwell,"⁴⁵ in order that "to them by Faith imputed, they may finde justification towards God, and peace of Conscience."⁴⁶ Only Christ can tell man how to endure the tribulations and give him the whole armor of God with which he may ward them off. Christ Himself has made atonement for man's sins by

⁴² Sedgefield, King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius, p. 204.

⁴³ Paradise Lost, XII, 298-299.

⁴⁴ Ibid., XII, 382.

⁴⁵ Ibid., XII, 246-248.

⁴⁶ Ibid., XII, 295-297.

conquering sin and death; and He alone can conquer sin and temptation in the conscience of man and give him true tranquility of soul and the confidence of eternal life.⁴⁷ With such "inward consolations recompensed,"⁴⁸ man may comprehend the meaning of the divine plan for mortals and realize that God's ways are truly justified.

Intermingled with the tribulations of this life are many manifestations of God's provisions for the happiness of mortal man. In the omnipotent plan, however, the end of happiness is to be achieved beyond this finite life.

Divine Providence decrees that

. . . suffering for Truths sake
Is fortitude to highest victorie,⁴⁹
And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life.

Man should never permit his affections for the things of the present to obscure the greater blessings that are in store for him after life on this earth is over. As God tempers justice with mercy, so should men temper the desires

⁴⁷ Langston, Tudor Books of Consolation, pp. 359-360.

⁴⁸ Paradise Lost, XII, 495.

⁴⁹ Paradise Lost, XII, 569-571.

of this life with moderation. Milton stated the matter thus:

Nor love thy Life, nor hate; but what thou
Livist live well . . .⁵⁰

Even death becomes a blessing rather than a curse when man sees through God's purpose. Corrupted as he was by sin, only death could purify man and make possible a future life. In order to receive this purification necessary for immortality, he should look upon death as a beneficent gift.

McColley briefly stated the four tenets upon which the poet based his conception of the justification of God:

Both angel and man were created just and right, able to have withstood temptation. Their fall resulted from exercise of the free will which God gave them and refused to take away. Divine fore-knowledge neither influenced nor occasioned their tragic error. Through His grace, and Christ's Atonement, God brought good out of evil, and by redeemed man repaired the damage wrought in heaven by the rebellious angels.⁵¹

When Adam understood the purport of all that the angel had related to him of the justice of God's plan, summed up in

⁵⁰ Paradise Lost, XII, 569-571.

⁵¹ McColley, Paradise Lost, pp. 199-200.

the modern language above, he accepted Divine Providence wholeheartedly:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
 That all this good of evil shall produce,
 And evil turn to good . . . full of doubt I stand,
 Whether I should repent me now of sin
 By mee done and occasiond, or rejoyce
 Much more, that much more good thereof
 shall spring,
 To God more glory, more good will to Men
 From God, and over wrauth grace shall abound.⁵²

Thus, with the opportunity to find a Paradise within himself far greater than the one he had lost, man in his extremity found true consolation in the justification of God's ways.

The pervading presence of Milton's religious truth gives to Paradise Lost a quality and a unique worth that is difficult to estimate; however, there are other contributing elements without which the poem would lose much of its value and beauty. In the first place, Milton was one of the most conscious, deliberate, and unerring craftsmen who ever lived. His was a grand style particularly adapted to lend artistic perfection to the Christian epic impulse. But the poet was also a man of deep humanity. His poetic principles were based firmly upon the belief that the quality and true eloquence of a poem, like all noble

creation, is no greater than the source from which it is derived. The ethical standards that guided his own way of life, therefore, were the basis for the deep meaning of the poem. In Paradise Lost, then, the blending of artistic beauty and virtuous worth makes for the epic a unique place among the poetry of the world.

Historical Background

Aesthetic Implication

The quality of Milton's poetry is inseparable from his vision of life; in no other poem is this fact more evident than in his magnificent epic Paradise Lost. While still in his young manhood, he had consecrated himself to the task of serving his country in some way with his pen. A great poem had seemed to him the most fitting memorial he could leave his countrymen---perhaps an 'epic, which should mean to Englishmen what the Iliad had meant to the Greeks, or the Aeneid to the Romans. Of the various subjects which Milton passed in review when he was evolving the idea of his great poem, none offered such literary possibilities as the story of the creation, temptation, and fall of man. Here was matter, to be sure, not for a national epic which should perpetuate the achievements of the English race, but for something far nobler---an epic of the entire human race.¹

Putting this poem upon the account of the fall found

¹ Frank Edgar Farley, Milton's Paradise Lost (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1898), p. 37.

in a few verses of *Genesis*, Milton incorporated in it the vast resources of his learning, his taste, and his experience. Already he was learned in both classical and Hebraic literature, and very early in his life he had achieved a rare kind of perfection in the art of writing both prose and poetry. Yet his perfection is not that of a brilliant writer of Latin verse nor of a consummate lyric poet, although he was both, but beneath the polish and exactness of his style there is a faith, which somehow fuses together the most violent and apparently incongruous elements, in the Divine order of the universe and in the ultimate triumph of good over evil.² The real impetus of this faith, in Milton's personal life, came from a turbulent period of his own life when his faith was deeply shaken. Out of this exigency grew the poem Paradise Lost, related to his deep needs of consolation and of his unconscious yearning towards some haven of security. It is noteworthy that he sacrificed none of the literary traditions in writing the poem, but built a noble edifice of artistry while universalizing his own feelings of the significance of life.

Aesthetically, the epic form was well suited for the work that Milton proposed. In the first place, divine

machinery was needed to carry the problems of Milton the poet in his personal need and universal man in his dilemma towards a satisfactory solution. The high seriousness of purpose; the elevation of individual interest towards a common interest for the human race; the exploits of the hero, as Adam in Paradise Lost, as affecting a cause very general in interest and comprehensive in range; the very intensity of the cause and the permanency of the results---all were especially suitable attributes for epic movement and epic method.³ Particularly could the fierce and strong spiritual clashes in Milton the man and in Paradise Lost the poem be presented with dignity in epic form only. In the second place, Milton's epic, essentially of abstractions both philosophically clear and religiously and artistically concrete, gave wide sweep for the stately moving lines and the use of imaginative devices. The poetry he devised in the use of blank verse was stiff, "homogeneous and architectural, in keeping with the insight it was endeavouring to assert . . . It is not dramatic verse mutilated by extrinsic epic qualities but heroic verse freed

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Marianna Woodhull, The Epic of Paradise Lost (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), p. 57; hereafter cited as Woodhull, The Epic of Paradise Lost.

from the troublesome bondage of rhythm and thereby set free
 to realize its nature."⁴ To this description can be added such decorative devices as latinisms, inversions, paraphrases, appositional clauses, and other paraphernalia beloved of Miltonic editors. B. Rajan, in a further description of his style, emphasized the close analogy of style and meaning:

The variety controlled by the steady persistent momentum of his paragraph, the nuances of sound and the refinements of tempo, above all that sense of fidelity to an immediate experience which occasionally springs to action in a simile---these things are done so effortlessly and aptly that we naturally regret that they are not done more often. . . Behind the triumphs of detail is the ultimate triumph of style. And the essence of that style is that it cannot be dramatic. It involves no struggle, no movement toward conversion, no transfiguration through experience of the mind, to the recognition and acceptance of a new order of reality. It can show you nothing that you have not seen. It can tell you only of what you have always believed. Reared then upon facts which it knows to be unchallengeable, it has to reflect in some measure the uncompromising certainties upon which it is founded and to imply through its level methodical persistence the nature of these ultimate and inexorable forces which the Providence of God deploys in history.

The style of Paradise Lost, then, is anything but dramatic and one cannot demand from it the qualities

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B. Rajan, Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 109; hereafter cited as Rajan, Paradise Lost and the Seventeenth Century Reader.

which one often demands of poetic drama. . . The poem is written in blank verse not because what it says cannot be said in prose but because it can be said more aptly and memorably in poetry. The style therefore has the virtues which such requirements stipulate: clarity, force, an unmistakable main line of assertion, and above all the sort of simplicity which proceeds from the prior assent of the reader to the precepts the poetry is expounding. And since these precepts are as general as precepts can be, the poetry which expounds them should be correspondingly general. It must never descend to the limiting concrete example. Its purpose is not to define the emotions which lie behind beliefs but to locate them and shape them in an impersonal ritual and so encourage you to know more intensely and more surely, the spiritual realities which you have always known.

Other poetic effects that add to the timbre of Milton's verse are the diction, the prosody, and the syntax, the subtle co-operation of the meaning and music, all of them tokens of the underlying permanence, the sweep of the grand style towards its destiny. This discussion would be incomplete without a reference to the poet's use of antithesis between simplicity, purity, goodness, health, light, life, and love on the one hand, and luxury, corruption, evil, disease, darkness, death, and hate on the other. Milton's all-embracing network of contrasts, the imaginative and pictoral illustration of right and wrong, is also a rich

element in the power of his architectural design.⁶ Nor could one overlook his classical adaptations. Even blindness, Milton declared, had not cut him off from his beloved classical authors, although they were always ranked below the Bible:

26.

Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
Cleer Spring, or shady Grove, or Sunnie Hill,
Smit with the love of sacred Song; but chief
Thee Sion, and the flowerie Brooks beneath
That wash thy hallowd feet, and warbling flow,
Nightly I visit.

III, 26-32

Thus, the delicately organized mind of the poet sought beneath the aesthetic beauty of his epic form for the deeper significance of life. In these intense longings, the lyric motive was often felt.

Milton's lyrical influence takes its source in his conception of nature as the manifestation of God. His fundamental ideas about nature are to be found in his prose work, The Treatise on Christian Doctrine, compiled from the Holy Scriptures. In this treatise, nature is the manifestation of the glory of God, for in the heavens, he reads this declaration, "I am Jehovah, that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself." This is the explanation of the

⁶Douglas Bush, Paradise Lost in Our Time (New York: Peter Smith, 1948), p. 97; hereafter cited as Bush, Paradise Lost in our Time.

7

peculiar power of Milton as a poet of nature. Every phase of nature is approached from the standpoint of the universe, and creation is the manifestation of the "High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see."⁷

In explaining this spiritual domination, Milton asserts:

The ordinary providence of God is that whereby he upholds and preserves the immutable order of causes appointed by him in the beginning. This is commonly and too frequently described by the name of nature: for nature cannot possibly mean anything but the mysterious power and efficacy of that divine voice, which went forth in the beginning and to which, as to a perpetual command, all things have since paid obedience.⁸

From this elevated conception of nature arise frequent bursts of pure lyric in Paradise Lost, starting from the epic and returning to the epic; indeed, the movement is from the epic to the lyric, and the lyric swiftly vibrates to the epic. The poet's belief that ideal beauty is attainable by humanity, and his sorrow over the failures of the quest most often and most deeply inspire the lyric: so it

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Woodhull, The Epic of Paradise Lost, p. 317.

⁸

Ibid., quoted from, Woodhull, The Epic of Paradise Lost, p. 318.

comes about that the spoiling of the lovely Garden of Eden by the entrance of sin is a lyric theme, and the lament of Adam and Eve over their lost Paradise has become a heritage of poets. One author extols Milton for having struck the source of all lyrics:

No poet has displayed so clearly before our eyes the pristine beauty of life, nor has shown with greater force the pathos of lost ideals, nor has sounded more inspiringly the appeal to mankind to return to Eden. He has convinced his reader that there was involved in the fall of Adam and Eve more than their individual happiness. Their joys and sorrows chronicle universal human experience, and for this reason, the lyric motive is lifted above the personal joy of Adam and Eve in the fresh morning of the world, or above their personal grief for their ruined Paradise, to the greatest and ⁹ most universal of themes, that of life's ideal.

The story brought to the poet consolation in his own inner vision and revived his longing for its realization. Woodhull defines Milton's conception of the lyric in Paradise Lost:

Milton's conception of the vastness of nature gives the dynamic power creating the lyric impulse. The majesty of nature may terrify and dwarf the lyric impulse, but not when the thought of the dignity of man keeps pace with a sense of the sublimity of nature. This greater power of the lyric carried to its fullest development merges with the epic. The force is too great to remain personal and passes into a universal uplift

toward the abstract. This is the play of the lyric, we constantly find in Paradise Lost. It is not to be explained alone by the epic theme, by the fact that Milton is so perfectly the artist that he blends all parts of the epic into harmony, but it is characteristic of Milton, in his conception of God, of nature, and of man . . . The display of so wide a background is in itself epic; earth, heaven, and hell are kept within our field of vision and a lyric sometimes helps to preserve the entirety of the scene. The connection of the earth with the infinite is kept by the celestial spectators, who applaud or deplore the drama acted in the world; cohorts of angels attend the Son of God on his way, when he planned the universe; angelic music applauded the works of creation in a passage that suggests a suppressed chorus for a tragedy on the model of Aeschylus or Euripides:¹⁰

Open, ye everlasting Gates, they sung,
 Open, ye Heav'ns, your living dores; let in
 The great Creator from his work returned
 Magnificent, his Six days work, a World.

VII, 565-568.

Thus was the first Day Eev'n and Morn;
 Nor passed uncelebrated, nor unsung
 By the Celestial Quires, when Orient Light
 Exhaling first from Darkness they beheld;
 Birth-day of Heav'n and Earth; with joy and shout
 The hollow Universal Orb they fill'd,
 And touch't thir Golden Harps, and hymning
 prais'd
 God and his works, Creatour him they sang,
 Both when first Eevning was, and when first
 Morn.

VII, 252-260

The divine influences were not only prominent in the life of

10

Woodhull, The Epic of Paradise Lost, pp. 325-326.

Adam and Eve in Eden, but all of their deep experiences were joined with thoughts of nature. In their morning prayer, they called upon all the works of God to join them in praise. All of these lyric outbursts bring consolation in an outlet of joy. They seem to have come from the soul of Milton, and he derived great comfort from their divine messages. Despite its severity, his Paradise Lost will always be a Pierian spring for nature poets and for humanity in general, because they may read in his lines the "deciphering of the handwriting of God in the wonders of his creation."

Moral Impact

Paradise Lost outlines the proper mode of life for man, is a great piece of simple morality; and Milton's experience of this morality makes his poem authentic. This pattern of ethical conduct began when as a mere child it was recognized that he was a boy of exceptional promise.¹¹ His studious nature dated from that time. When he enrolled at Christ's College at the age of sixteen, the Reverend

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Kenneth Muir, John Milton (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1955), p. 10.

H. J. Todd says that his "domestick habits were those of a sober and temperate student. Of wine, or any strong liquors, he drank little. In his diet he was rarely influenced by delicacy of choice; illustrating his own admirable rule:¹¹²"

The rule of not too much; by temperance taught
 In what thou eatst and drinkst, seeking
 from thence
 Due nourishment, not glutinous delight.
 XI, 531-533

At first, it appears, Milton was unpopular with his fellow-undergraduates. He was, perhaps, intellectually arrogant; and his purity of life and effeminacy in appearance earned him the nickname of the Lady of Christ's. Yet, as he was careful to point out, he was athletic, ruddy complexioned, and skillful with the sword:

He has also represented himself as a man of moderate stature, neither too lean nor too corpulent; and so far endued with strength

12

Reverend H. J. Todd, Some Account of the Life and Writings of John Milton (London: Derived Principally from Documents in His Majesty's State-Paper Office, 1826), pp. 241-242; hereafter cited as Todd, Some Account of the Life and Writings of John Milton.

and spirit, that, as he always wore a sword, he wanted not, while light revisited his eyes, the skill or the courage to use it.¹³

As a young man, there seems to be some grounds of excuse for his pride. When he was about ten years of age, he wrote verses which were considered marvelous in the home circle, and he was henceforward brought up deliberately to be a man of genius.¹⁴ The enterprise was accepted as normal in the family. The habit of looking upon himself as a great man was thus acquired by the poet in early childhood. He came to accept it as simple and natural and probably believed that every family was similarly educating a young Milton. He was rudely awakened to the real nature of the situation by his new companions in college; yet to a large extent, he finally succeeded in gaining their affection. This change in opinion testifies to the amiability of his character.

Regardless of the reasons for his pride, however, literary ambition and pride of intellect remained the

13

Todd, Some Account of the Life and Writings of John Milton, pp. 240-241.

14

Denis Saurat, Milton, Man and Thinker (New York: The Dial Press, 1925), p. 5; hereafter cited as Saurat, Milton, Man and Thinker.

dominant factors in his life. From his youth through his whole life, he was animated by moral, religious, and patriotic motives. He had an intense hatred of all compromise when an ideal was at stake, and a clear domination of intelligence over passion; but he had pride, moral pride, as a sense of his own worth which was not to be degraded, and intellectual pride, also. He thought so highly of his reason and had such trust in his intellect, that he wanted his reason to be mistress absolute in himself. His plans and his pride naturally went together. For the seriousness of his purpose, complete mastery of self was essential. His ambitious program and ethical standards led to a lifetime regimentation of his efforts and time. The Reverend Todd gives a picture of the ordinary routine of a day's activity during his later years:

He once delighted in walking and using exercise; and appears to have amused himself in botanical pursuits; but after he was confined by age and blindness, he had a machine to swing in for the preservation of his health. In summer he then rested in bed from nine to four, in winter to five. If, at these hours, he was not disposed to rise, he had a person by his bed-side to read to him. When he first rose, he heard a chapter in the Hebrew Bible, and commonly studied till twelve; then used some exercise for an hour; then dined; afterwards played on the organ or bass-viol, and either sung himself or made his wife sing . . . After his regular indulgence in musical relaxation, he studied till six; then entertained his visitors till eight; then enjoyed a light supper; and, after a pipe of

tobacco and a glass of water, retired to bed.¹⁵

His habits, however, were far from those of the Puritan of popular imagination. His nephew Phillips says that in his young manhood he "frequented the beaux of the capital, dressed as elegantly as any of them, and allowed himself 'a gaudy-day' in their company once or twice a month."¹⁶ It is generally conceded that he was serene and cheerful in nature and that he was affable and instructive in conversation. His daughter Deborah once remarked that her father "was delightful company, the life of the conversation, and that on account of a flow of subject, and an unaffected cheerfulness and civility."¹⁷ An acquaintance relates that he had also "a gravity in his temper, not melancholy, or not till the latter part of his life, not sour, nor morose or illnatured; but a certain severity of mind; a mind, not condescending to little things."¹⁸ But everything had to be subordinated to his supreme poetical.

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Todd, Some Account of the Life and Writings of John Milton, pp. 242-243.

¹⁶

Saurat, Milton, Man and Thinker, p. 12.

¹⁷

Quoted from Todd, Some Account of the Life and Writings of John Milton, p. 243.

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 243.

enterprise. He looked upon the world as from a tower in his pride, strength, and seriousness---a perfect master of himself, his mind set with a sort of grimness on getting out of his great gifts all they could produce.

His strict moral discipline and his native ability pointed the way to later success in his enterprise. He had a great knowledge of literature and took a special delight in the classics. It is said that he could almost repeat Homer by memory. His favorite book, however, was always the Bible. From this book he derived his religious and ethical principles which were to serve as a basis for his later important work in the political affairs of his country. But before he was able to fulfill the dream of his youth to compose a great poem, his life had to be further disciplined, largely by outward forces, in his work for the cause of political justice and spiritual freedom during the civil conflict in England.

It was after he had started on the grand tour of Europe in his youth that the news of troubrous times in England cut short his travels; "I thought it shame," he said, "to be travelling for amusement abroad while my fellow citizens were fighting for liberty at home." So home he went to play a man's part in the civil strife of the next twenty years. With his pen he fought on the Puritan side, and on the establishment of the Commonwealth was

appointed Latin Secretary to conduct foreign correspondence of Cromwell's government. Zealous performance of his duties brought him the reward of total blindness. Milton faced his blindness with the greatest courage; he was forewarned but did not shrink back. He preferred the task allotted to him and paid the penalty. The extinction of his eyesight was followed by the extinction of his political career. After the Restoration in 1660 his worldly circumstances were of a precarious nature. In Paradise Lost he wrote of his own situation at this time---fallen on evil days, encompassed with dangers, and hating the revelers of the court of Charles II:

. . . fall'n on evil dayes,
On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil
tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compast
round.

VII, 25-27

The substance of his belief in God had been to a large extent his conviction that God had a special mission for England and for himself; hence everything that had given him hope from God for so many years was in danger of being utterly cancelled. Professor Sewell sees a general movement in Milton's mind from hope to faith, from a belief somewhat shallowly grounded in "the conviction that God had a special mission for England and for himself," to a

deeper, humbler, less questioning sense of God as wise and merciful, though inscrutable in His ways. "During the latter half of the decade 1650-1660," says Professor Sewell,
¹⁹
 "the wind began to go out of Milton's sails." His manifold disappointments left him with a view of God "impoverished and starved of significance," "compelling to his mind but chilling to his heart." To effect a reconciliation between heart and mind was now his task. "What could be the nature of God---now that Milton could no longer believe in the special care of God for his people? In what relation could Milton, could all men stand with God, now that it seemed no longer possible that God had chosen Milton and England for a special work? What were God's ways with men?"
²⁰ Paradise Lost not only gives Milton's answers to these questions; it also shows him in the very act of finding the answers.

The poem Paradise Lost thus rests firmly upon moral principles formed partly through lifelong habits of the author and partly through his experiences testing the validity of those habits. From these principles Milton

19

Arthur Sewell, A Study in Milton's Christian Doctrine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 77.

20

Ibid., p. 78.

derived that "he who would write of worthy deeds worthily must write with mental endowments and experience of affairs not less than were in the deer of the same."²¹ According to his high ethical standards, if he is to achieve true eloquence, then, to speak with the substance as well as the semblance of worth, he must himself be good. If he is to be believed, he must demonstrate his goodness. There is a famous description of the noble poet in the Apology for Smeectymnuus:

(p. xxi)

... he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to be a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things.²²

For Milton "... all the rhetorical and philosophical reasons that justify including affirmations of his own probity in his prose pamphlets apply to Paradise Lost as well."²³ Also if he is to be successful in his assertion of Providence, in his justification of God, and in his larger

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John S. Diekhoff, Milton's Paradise Lost (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), p. 15; hereafter cited as Diekhoff, Milton's Paradise Lost.

²²

Ibid., quoted from, p. 16.

²³

Ibid., p. 16.

intention to lead men into paths of honesty and the good life, he must convince his readers of his probity and of his right and authority to speak on the subject at hand. Milton stated his aims clearly: As a philosophical poet, his task was to invent or to adapt a story that would represent the world as he saw it or that would interpret or explain that aspect of it with which he was concerned. As a moral poet, he had to present a narrative that would persuade his reader to adopt a scheme of life. His job as a Christian poet, of course, was to keep in his invention ²⁴ within the framework set by revelation and tradition.

Upon this moral and spiritual conception depends to a large extent the success of Paradise Lost. The poem was a culmination of the poet's total experiences from proud belief in the exemption of God's regenerate from all evil consequences to a humble acceptance of a purpose in the lives of the righteous for both good and evil. The process of his enlightenment involved, first of all, an increasing recognition of the way in which his conception of God had to be transformed. In Paradise Lost God was at first an arbitrary Deity conceived and challenged in the figure of Satan,

²⁴

Diekhoff, Milton's Paradise Lost, p. 8.

but He became more and more a Being whose nature was goodness and whose delight it was to communicate his good to those who would receive it. Then He was not terrible to man, but good. Man was terrible to himself. The poet finally saw that this was how his problem had to be solved. His counterpart is seen in Adam, who had at last learned wisdom. This is his statement of some of the things hard experience had taught him:

Henceforth I learne that to obey is best,
And love with fear the onely God, to walk
As in his presence, ever to observe
His providence, and on him sole depend,
Merciful over all his works, with good
Still overcoming evil, and by small
Accomplishing great things, by things deemed
weak
Subverting worldly strong, and worldly wise
By simply meek.

XII, 561-569

This wholehearted assent to the mental discipline through which he had accepted and held together the good and the ill that life brought him was the primary wealth and vitality of Milton's nature. Briefly comprehended, man's moral obligation consisted in a positive aspect, or the cultivation of the virtues; and a negative aspect, or abstinence from the vices. In a wide sense, all virtues were derived from exercise of right reason and will power; while origin of vices devolved from unreason and intemperance. Moral man in himself was insufficient in the midst of the

pressures of life; but regenerate man, possessing the moral virtues reinforced by the Divine essence through a saving faith in Christ, would find sustenance through life's vicissitudes. Hence, ethical principles of right living plus faith in God's mercy and justice were the essential attributes of man's inner strength.

Basic to the whole ethical system in Milton's thinking was the power of free choice. As a self-knowing, rational being, Man was free to be obedient or he was free to fall---and he chose to cut himself off from God. He might ---had he not yielded to temptation and alienated himself from God---have turned "all to spirit;" he might have been "improved by tract of time." Though thwarted in his first purpose for Man, God through His Son still provided a plan for his redemption; but He formed Man "free and free he must remain." Upon this contingency everything worthwhile to man depends. This power lends dignity to man, placing him in this respect on an equal with the angels; but it also entails great responsibility. Under the dispensation of Grace, Man may choose to be good, or he may choose to be bad. He may choose God, or he may reject Him. Upon will power and temperate living to a large extent depends the

happiness of Man in this life---and upon his choices hangs the destiny of his immortal soul. This is the importance in Milton's thinking of the sovereignty of the reason and will over passion and appetites, and this is the reason he has made Adam and Eve a universal example of the trials and weakness of every man and every woman. For out of this concept of the liberty and dignity of Man evolved his ultimate feeling of consolation in God's providence---that evil has been turned to good account.

The entire poem Paradise Lost points to an understanding of the paradox of evil and good. The first positive good to come of evil was the creation of man and his world. Thus, out of the fall of the angels came good. The world itself was good, but the harmony of the universe, as well as that in man's soul, was disturbed by the second fall. Again, evil was turned to good account when Man attains a greater Paradise within himself than the one he lost. The miseries of life are explained when Man realizes that he is being tried and tested in order to be worthy of the life to come. Michael explains to Adam the nobler end of his creation:

11

Judg not what is best
By pleasure, though to Nature seeming meet,
Created, as thou art, to nobler end
Holie and pure.

XI, 603-606

And, finally, even death to the regenerate man, the one who through wise choices and obedience is accounted worthy, is "to the faithful death the gate of life."

The long series of disillusionments that had set the problem had also provided Milton with the elements of the answer. The young Milton had been on fire with hope and confidence in the complete and immediate regeneration of England and in time of the world. He was assuredly religious, but he was then on the rising and winning side; his personal faith had not been tested. But the Milton of Paradise Lost had undergone a long series of disillusionments. He had lost faith in bishops, king, parliament, people, army, even Cromwell. And then, while Paradise Lost was being composed came the Restoration. His twenty years of service to the good cause, his eyesight, all his hopes, were gone. At moments he had been tempted to despair even of God's providence. But in spite of many defeats, he was not conquered. What emerged now, in Paradise Lost, was a more truly religious faith, not attached to and partly dependent upon dreams of a new era, but founded upon God and the soul of individual man. The aggressive reformer had arrived at the full realization that "in His will is our peace." The workings of Milton's thought and his own private experience, as we have seen again and again, go together.

Perhaps if Milton's political and personal ambitions had been realized, if he had found life less difficult, a Paradise Lost would have been written. His personal experiences had little effect upon his poetic theories; his Christian theology underlying the philosophy of the poem, which had been determined upon in his earlier life, was still the basic structure upon which his epic rested. The fulfillment of his youthful vision to produce a great epic would have been essentially the same, but the poem would have been different. The failure of his terrestrial hopes made something more of Paradise Lost. The very foundations of his religious faith had been shaken, and the basic elements of his theology had to be revised. Disaster gave to the poem that vital and impassioned interest which makes of it more than a work of art or even an epic of the spiritual conception of the human race. Through his own personal anguish, Milton was able to understand the depths of universal suffering; and in his groping for consolation in the midst of his shattered dreams has been found his counterpart, Universal Man, in interrogating destiny. This it is that places Paradise Lost so high in human consciousness. It is an attempt to find the precise answer to the metaphysical question of mankind at a loss to understand its repeated failures in its struggle against Fate. But it is first and last a voice of consolation singing its way to ecstasy as a

flash of insight into Eternal Providence finally illuminates
the soul of Man.

An Analysis of Paradise Lost

When I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,
 In slender Book his vast Design unfold,
Messiah Crown'd, God's Reconcil'd Decree,
Rebell'ing Angels, the Forbidden Tree,
 Heav'n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, All; the Argument
 Held me a while disdoubting his Intent,
 That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)
 The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song.

• • •
 Yet as I read, soon growing less severe,
 I lik'd his Project, the success did fear;
 Through that wide Field how he his way should find
 O'er which lame Faith leads Understanding blind;

• • •
 Pardon me, Mighty Poet, nor despise
 My causeless, yet not impious, surmise.

• • •
 Thou hast not miss'd one thought that could be fit,
 And all that was improper dost omit:

• • •
 That Majesty which through thy Work doth Reign
 Draws the Devout, deterring the Profane.
 And things divine thou treat'st of in such state
 As them preserves, and thee, inviolate.
 At once delight and horror on us seize,
 Thou sing'st with so much gravity and ease;
 And above human flight dost soar aloft
 With Plume so strong, so equal, and so soft
 The Bird nam'd from that Paradise you sing
 So never flags, but always keeps on Wing.

• • •
 Thy Verse created like thy Theme sublime, 1
 In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not Rime.

A. H.

The idea of consolation is fully developed throughout the poem Paradise Lost. It was Milton's task to find its place in the human scheme by reconciling Divine Providence

¹"On Paradise Lost," in John Milton's Paradise Lost, Merritt Y. Hughes, ed. (New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1935), pp. 4-5.

with the origin and nature of sin. In order to do this, the poet was under compulsion to embody in the epic his belief in the transmutation of all the evils and miseries resulting from the fall of man into good account. The story of the conflict between the two powers, (Satan aided by Sin and Death and God) by the Messiah, then, is concerned primarily with the problem of bringing good out of evil. For this reason man's fall issues, necessarily, not in a tragedy but in a Christian epic in which Christ is the hero who triumphs over Satan; and man becomes a hero only when, through faith and hope, he partakes of the Messiah's triumph. When Milton (early in the poem) introduces his majestic theme of the fall and redemption of man, he strikes a responsive chord in the heart of Christian men and women in every place and in all ages. [The music of] the first lines gives the keynote of man's universal problem and sets the tempo for a comforting solution: when M. tells of the promise of a "greater Man" to aid those who fail to regain the "blissful Seat" in Heaven.

all reveal simultaneously offers

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit
 Of that Forbidden Tree, Whose mortal taat
 Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
 Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
 Sing Heav'nly Muse.

I, 1-6

P. 60

In giving a plausible reason for Man's first disobedience and his loss of Eden with all that the act has since implied, the poet faced a huge task. He had to explain, first, how this irrevocable loss came about, and

secondly how an all-loving and all-powerful God could allow it to happen. The first of these questions involves the nature of man and of woman, and of their position between the enormous warring powers of Heaven and of Hell. The second question makes it necessary for the poet to make that incredibly bold prayer for inspiration in which he states his main purpose, to vindicate Divine Providence. How well the poet achieves his aim may be seen in the (majestic) movement of the (stately) lines which (sweep) the entire theme to a harmonious conclusion. [In the solemn music of the epic may be heard the rumble of approaching disaster or the staccato notes of discord, but the poet is able to achieve an effect of harmony and simplicity in both form and content that tends to make Paradise Lost a poem among poems in both style and universal interest.] The thread of consolation is woven consistently throughout the [majestic structure] as Milton, [in a general framework of prodigious and universal extent, undertakes his task] unfolds his vast design to defend Eternal Providence.

[Although Milton's theology is important in an understanding of the epic, his most effective justification of God is to be found in a powerful and dramatic narrative which instructs more by example than by precept. That the poet desired primarily to address the varied emotions of Man requires no evidence other than the preponderance of space devoted to pure narrative. The story was the thing.

Paradise Lost is the story of the conflict between the forces of God and the fallen angels, and between God and Satan for the soul of man. It is also an account of Man's first disobedience and his alienation from God which plunged him into sin. More than that, it is a narrative that extends beyond the limits of the framework of the poem, through succeeding ages, and into the future ad infinitum. It is an explanation of the origin of suffering, an answer to the universal questions, "Why is man obliged to work hard to feed himself and his family? Why has woman to bear children in pain, and why is she submitted to the slavery of marriage?" But it is finally a story of triumph, of consolation in the midst of woe, and of the superiority of good over evil through the Providence of God. [The philosophical premises for Milton's beliefs are summed up as follows:]

P. 60

The poet's explicit or doctrinal justification of God is as noteworthy for its simplicity as for its relative brevity. Indeed, this justification rests ultimately upon four basic conceptions. Both angel and man were created just and right, able to have withstood temptation. Their fall resulted from exercise of the free will which God gave them, and refused to take away. Divine foreknowledge neither influenced nor occasioned their tragic error. Through His grace and Christ's Atonement, God brought good out of evil, and by redeemed man repaired the damage wrought in heaven by the rebellious angels.²

2

McColley, Paradise Lost, pp. 199-200.

Milton's conception of Eternal Providence rests essentially in the idea that both angel and man were created just and right with power to stand or fall:

Such I created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and
them who faild.

III, 100-101

Both angel and man, therefore, fall because of the exercise of free will. Although God in His omniscience foresaw the fall, Divine foreknowledge neither influenced nor occasioned their error:

If I foreknew,
Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault,
Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown.
So without least impulse or shadow of Fate,
Or aught by me immutable foreseen,
They trespass, Authors to themselves in all,
Both what they judge and what they choose.

III, 117-123

God did, however, decree their punishment and man's salvation; as essentially a God of mercy, He was also a God of justice.

When early in the poem the fallen angels are portrayed as lying

. . . vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe
Confounded though immortal,

I, 52-53

an evidence of God's justice is seen. In order to "justify the ways of God to men," Eternal Justice decrees that such a place of punishment be prepared

For those rebellious, here their Prison ordain'd
 In utter darkness, and thir portion set,
 As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
 As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.

I, 71-74

There is no place for evil in heaven. When pride and hate have taken their abode in those rebel angels, justice requires that wicked spirits can no longer dwell with angels of "up-right heart and pure." Satan admits his own inner corruption when he decides to a

. . . study of revenge, immortal hate,
 And courage never to submit or yield.

I, 107-108

[The evil within Satan, unless he finds a place of repentance, justly bare him from good, for purity can no longer exist when polluted by sin.] As a free moral agent, ^{Satan} he chooses his own destiny. The consequences, however, as Milton shows, are of far greater extent than to affect merely [the transgressor]. Satan causes a host of angels to fall; and in seducing Adam and Eve, he brings about no end of desolation, grief, and sin. God has the power to intervene, if He chooses to do so, for the archangel could never

. . . thence
 (Have) ris'n or heav'n his head, but that the will
 And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
 Left him at large to his own dark designs,
 That with reiterated crimes he might
 Heap on himself damnation.

I, 210-215

The principle of justice, however, demanded that the Devil should, by the ^{independen^t} exercise of his own moral choice

and by his evil deeds, fully merit the final decree of death to which he was to be condemned. The appearance of justice in God could be preserved only by the most liberal permission for Satan to work out his own tragedy. Consolation may be derived from the fact that whatever advantage Satan may gain in the struggle for man will be only apparent and temporary, an evil out of which will ultimately arise a greater good. The limits of evil were definitely predetermined by an all-powerful heaven. Milton asserts that it was only

Through God's high sufferance for the
Trial of Man.

I, 366

that the fallen angels were, within bounds, permitted their freedom. Having known liberty with the other angels before his fall, Satan realizes the extent of this privilege. Looking about for the first time upon the gloomy Hell to which he has been assigned, he prefers

. . . to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.
I, 263

for, he says,

We shall be free

Here at least

I, 258-259

This statement implies a far different kind of freedom from that which God proposes. Upon the demonstration of God's

justice depends rational freedom toward a higher good; Satan's choice serves only to narrow the limits of his bondage to himself. Although now lost in this enthrallment to himself, he again admits his freedom in his address to the sun:

Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
 Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
 But Heav'n's free Love dealt equally to all?
 Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,
 To me alike, it deals eternal woe.

IV, 66-70

Milton describes Heaven's utterance of free will in mortal man when God observes Satan on his way to deceive Man. At first there had been a rumor of a new race that God was creating

. . . whom his choice regard
 Should favor equal to the sons of Heaven.
 I, 653-654

Later, the idea had taken specific shape in Satan's mind to get revenge for his own downfall by finding some means to thwart God's purpose for His new creation. [In order to ascertain what mischief he may be able to accomplish, Satan decides that

. . . this place may lye expos'd,
 The utmost border of his Kingdom, left
 To their defence who hold it; here perhaps
 Som advantagous act may be achiev'd
 . . . that thir God
 May prove thir foe, and with repenting hand
 Abolish his own works.

II, 360-363; 368-370]

When God sees "Satan there coasting the wall of Heaven," on his way to fulfill his self-appointed mission to spy upon the new earth, He gives to His Son a preview of what is to happen to man. Milton's ideas which he embodies here in Paradise Lost imply that there is dignity in the freedom of choice in individual man, but that the privilege carries with it religious responsibility and religious discipline. His philosophy dictates that man, created with freedom of choice, must be entirely responsible for his disobedience. God himself affirms the point at great length, saying of Man in predicting his fall,

For Man will hark'n to his glozing lyes,
 And easily transgress the sole command,
 Sole pledge of his obedience: So will fall,
 Hee and his faithless Progenie: Whose fault?
 Whose but his own? ingrate, he had of mee
 All he could have; I made him just and right,
 Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
 Not free, what proof could they have givn sincere
 Of true allegiance, constant Faith, or Love,
 Where onely what they needs must do, appear'd,
 Not what they would? what praise could they receive?
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,
 Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
 Not mee. They therefore as to right belongd,
 So were created, nor can justly accuse
 Thir Maker, or thir making, or thir Fate.

III, 93-99; 102-113

The very capacity to obey or disobey is a necessity in the life of a rational being. If God's creatures are so constituted that they are unable to act contrary to His

commands, there can be no virtue in their obedience. They must then serve necessity, not God, and are not rational beings; for "Reason is also choice." The power for making right choices, then, depends upon the ability to think rationally.

God and reason are synonymous. Since God is also personified Good, whatever He ordains for his servants is for their good. The very nature of God, however, precludes the use of force; those who choose to serve Him must do so of their own free will. Is God tyrannical and cruel, then, in imposing the limitation of obedience upon the exercise of free will? This is a question posited by every philosophy that attempts to reconcile evil and Divine Providence. The answer is to be found in Milton's theology. In the first place, the immutable laws of nature in God's creation serve to emphasize the justice in obedience. A certain behavior, in the very nature of the universe, decrees consequences corresponding to the degree or nature of the act. The outcome of right choices depends upon obedience in the degree to which nature's laws are binding. Obedience brings happiness, but misery often follows as a result of disobedience. Secondly, there is harmony in all of God's creation. Obedience to the laws of nature brings about a continuation of nature's harmony; disobedience produces a jarring effect and discord. Since harmony is the essence of

God Himself, Man, created in the image of God, was originally formed in harmonious proportions. Continued harmony externally depends upon man's behavior. Wrong actions, then, stem from faulty reasoning; and the effect of disturbed harmony without is to produce chaos within the soul of man. Obedience, then, means right reasoning.]

Among mortals Milton has produced no examples for Adam and Eve to follow in making choices. The good angel Abdiel, though, serves to show the rationality of such a freedom; for he illustrates that angels in their freedom of the will, [freedom of choice on rational grounds,] were just like men. They were free to stand or fall. Adam had been amply forewarned of the dire consequences which the responsibility of such a freedom involved:

That thou art happy, owe to God;
 That thou continu'st such, owe to thyself,
 That is, to thy obedience; therein stand.
 This was that caution giv'n thee, be advis'd.
 God made thee perfect, not immutable;
 And good he made thee, but to persevere
 He left it in thy power, ordain'd thy will
 By nature free, not over-rul'd by Fate
 Inextricable, or strict necessity;
 Our voluntarie service he requires,
 Not our necessitated, such with him
 Finds no acceptance, nor can find, for how
 Can hearts, not free, be tri'd whether they serve
 Willing or no, who will but what they must
 By Destinie, and can no other choose?

V, 520-534

[And Raphael has already enforced the lesson with the telling examples of the angels, true and fallen:

My self, and all th' Angelic Host that stand
 In sight of God enthron'd, our happy state
 Hold, as you yours, while our obedience holds;
 On other surety none; freely we serve,
 Because wee freely love, as in our will
 To love or not; in this we stand or fall:
 And som are fall'n, to disobedience fall'n,
 And so from Heav'n to deepest Hell; O fall
 From what high state of bliss into what woe!

V, 535-544

Satan, like Raphael, supports the thesis by recalling that:

. . . other Powers as great
 Fall not.

IV, 63-64

Adam also knows upon what conditions his freedom exists:

. . . nor knew I not
 To be both will and deed created free;
 Yet that we never shall forget to love
 Our maker, and obey him whose command
 Single, is yet so just, my constant thoughts
 Assur'd me, and still assure.

V, 548-553

God makes it clear that Adam was warned of his danger in
 order that he might be sufficient to withstand Satan when
 +
 he sends Raphael to

. . . advise him of his happy state,
 Happiness in his power left free to will,
 Left to his own free Will, his Will though free,
 Yet mutable; whence warne him to beware
 He swerve not, too secure.

V, 234-238

Still more clearly the good angel comes in answer to the
 foreshadowing appeal that Milton makes in his own person:

32. O for that warning voice, which he who saw
 Th' Apecclypse, heard cry in Heaven aloud,

Then when the Dragon, put to second rout,
Came furious down to be revenged on men,
We to the inhabitants on Earth!

IV, 1-5

And Milton himself comments:

So spake th' Eternal Father, and fulfill'd
All justice.

V, 246-247

Raphael's final injunction is the most pronounced of all:

Be strong, live happy, and love, but first of all
Him whom to love is to obey, and keep
His great command; take heed least Passion sway
Thy judgment to do aught, which else free Will
Would not admit; thine and of all thy Sons
The weal or woe in thee is plac't; beware
I in thy persevering shall rejoice,
And all the Blest; stand fast; to stand or fall
Free in thine own Arbitrement it lies.
Perfect within, no outward aid require;
And all temptation to transgress repel.

VIII, 633-643

Having received ample explanations and warnings, Adam is in
a position to admonish Eve that

. . . God left free the Will, for what obeys
Reason, is free, and Reason he made right
But bid her will beware, and still erect,
Least by some faire appearing good surpris'd
She dictates false, and misinforme the Will
To do what God expressly hath forbid.

IX, 351-356

His sudden change of mind,

Go, for thy stay, not free, absents thee more,
IX, 372

is somewhat an echo of God in his refusal to resort to force;
however, in Adam's case from his sudden magnanimity may be

traced the disastrous fall. Thus forewarned, man is fore-armed and should triumph. That he does not is a failure of reason and will for which he himself is entirely responsible.

When Adam falls, it is that he places his loyalty to Eve above his loyalty to God. Satan's hosts had no lover's code as an excuse; nevertheless there was conflict of loyalty. As long as Satan was one with God, obedience of his followers to his will was right; but when Satan became rebellious, it devolved upon his followers to make a choice between him and God. The conflict of loyalties was as real for Abdiel as for anyone, but Abdiel alone of Satan's host chose the right. To Adam, Abdiel's steadfastness should have been proof that right choices are entirely possible.

Raphael in his narrative commends the good angel to Adam:

. . . the Seraph Abdiel faithful found,
Among the faithless, faithful only hee;
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,
Unshak'n, unseduc'd, unterrifi'd
His Loyaltie he kept, his Love, his Zeale;
Nor number, nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single.

V, 896-903

It is the right use of reason, however, rather than blind loyalty upon which Abdiel, in his rebuke of Satan, bases his faithfulness. It is his reasoning that in part teaches the effectiveness of obedience rather than force. The faculty of reason, therefore, was implanted by God in man as a guide to truth and conduct and is essentially the

basis upon which man's freedom rests. In its effectual workings, reason makes man, in his degree, like God; it enables him, within limits, to understand the purposes of a God who is perfect reason, as well as perfect justice, goodness, and love. The Christian's greatest consolation is comprehended in the extent of God's love which provides a plan of salvation for those who through unreason warrant stern, unremitting justice. Milton stresses the prime power of love as a motivation for right reason; his avowed theme, the assertion of Eternal Providence, means the assertion of eternal love. The principle of right and just is determined, then, not by the tyrannical and arbitrary pleasure of Him that has all power, but by rational and just order overshadowed by an all-pervading love. Man's part is to manifest faith in this love. For Milton, faith and consequent obedience to the will of God are the basis of virtuous action. It is lack of faith that makes possible the disobedience of Adam and Eve. When faith is lacking, the whole moral structure breaks down. God must be first of all. When Adam and Eve have broken faith with God, the result is their sin.

Eve's faulty reasoning, as well as the consequences of her act of disobedience, is of special significance to all ages. When approached by Satan in the form of a serpent, she at first insists that

... we live
Law to ourselves, our Reason is our Law.
IX, 653-654

Prompted by the tempter, she begins a process of reasoning which leads her ever farther from the truth. In disobedience to God, she completely reverses the natural order of effecting good through evil; and in substituting belief in Satan for faith in God, she upsets all the harmony of the universe. Milton shows an unusual insight into human nature as he portrays Eve in the role of instituting false rationalization for clear reasoning. The poet communicates a deep sense of fatality to the lines as Eve yields to the temptation. When Adam awakes to the poignant reality of what has happened, he decides against God and reason while choosing to throw in his lot with Eve. Their first sin leads to the second, and losing the government of self, they become slaves of appetite. [Their first lustful intoxication ended,

They sate them down to weep, nor onely Teares
Raind at thir Eyes, but high Winds worse within
Began to rise, high Passions, Anger, Hate,
Mistrust, Suspicion, Discord, and shook sore
Thir inward state of Mind, calm Region once
And full of Peace, now tost and turbulent;
For Understanding rul'd not, and the Will
Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
To sensual Appetite, who from beneath
Usurping over sovran Reason, claimed
Superior sway.

IX, 1121-1131

This glimpse into the recompense of disobedience and sin

is a graphic picture to remember. In one sense, it may be comforting to realize from the scene that God's laws are immutable and that obedience, conversely, brings its own recompense of reward. But for the guilty pair---and for man in general---this was the beginning of sorrows.

Milton in his De doctrina has set forth the enormity of the crime in the following language:

[What sin can be named, which was not included in this one act? It comprehended at once distrust in the divine veracity, and a proportionate credulity in the assurances of Satan; unbelief; ingratitude; disobedience; gluttony; in the man excessive uxorioussness, in the woman a want of proper regard for her husband, in both an insensibility to the welfare of their offspring, and that offspring the whole human race; parricide; theft, invasion of the rights of others, sacrilege, deceit, presumption in aspiring to divine attributes, fraud in the means employed to attain the object, pride and arrogance.]³

It is this foreboding category of sins---the direct consequence of the acts of the first parents---that has seemed so appalling to their progeny. >

[In Paradise Adam, caught in the toils of sin, struggles in despair. Omnicious changes take place as Sin and Death, now let loose upon earth, wreak havoc; as a

³ Quoted from Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall," ELH, IV (1937), p. 162.

consequence, the earth is made subject to death and mutability. For the first time, Adam and Eve become subject to all the woes of humanity. Thus begins all the afflictions and trials, all the agony of soul, that have since existed in the world. That the results of his sins were transmitted to future generations Adam was horrified to learn:

All that I eat or drink, or shall beget,
Is propagated curse.

X, 728-729

An echo of his own puzzlement has been heard throughout the ages:

Ah, why should all mankind
For one man's fault thus guiltless be condemn'd,
If guiltless?

X, 822-824

Was the battle between supernatural forces of Good and Evil to issue in anything but a hopeless tragedy for the human pair? Or could it be made to yield an evangel of great hope to all mankind? Satan and his followers, exulting in their success, believe that God has weakly yielded to their superior cunning. Milton, however, continues his emphatic assurance of the ultimate triumph of good. His account of the struggle, taken entire, moves step by step in an orderly exposition of the superiority of good over evil.

Early in the poem Milton points the way for the eventual defeat of evil. Although apparently it would

seen that Satan has won 'the victory,' it is only that
Satan . . . while he sought

It is Evil to others, and enrag'd might see
How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
angel Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shown
On Man by him seduc't, but on himself
Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance pour'd.
I, 215-220

Then there is the poet's voice with the statement of God's
permissive will and of His wisdom and justice in allowing
evil:

Iove Meanwhile the hainous and despightful act
Of Satan done in Paradise, and how
full³ Bee in the Serpent had perverted Eve,
of Her Husband shee, to taste the fatall fruit,
Was known in Heav'n; for what can escape the Eye
Of God All-seeing, or deceave his Heart
Omniscient, who in all things wise and just,
Hinder'd not Satan to attempt the minde
Of Man, with strength entire, and free will arm'd,
Complete, to have discover'd and repulst
Whatever wiles of Foe or seeming Friend.

X, 1-11

There follows a demonstration of what actually may come
from evil when the Almighty declares that

. . . I call'd and drew them thither
My Hell-hounds, to lick up the draf and filth
Which man's polluting Sin with taint hath shed
On what was pure, till cramm'd and gorg'd, nigh burst
With suckt and glutted offal, at one sling
Of thy victorious Arm, well-pleasing Son.

X, 629-634

But the real consolation to be derived from the paradox of
the transmutation of evil into good is to be found in the
act of the Saviour

. . . who shall quell
The aduersarie Serpent, and bring back

Through the world's wilderness long wandered man
Safe to eternal Paradise of rest.

XII, 311-314

It is no wonder that Adam is (filled) with joy as the
angel relates to him these glad tidings, & In his ecstasy
he cries out,

O Prophet of glad tidings, finisher of
Of utmost hope! now clear I understand
What oft my steadiest thoughts have searcht in vain,
that God with man unites.

XII, 375-382

Lovejoy in what he calls the "paradox of the fortunate
fall" has effectively summed up Milton's final expression
of how evil is turned to good account:

The Fall could never be sufficiently condemned
and lamented; and likewise, when all its conse-
quences were considered, it could never be suf-
ficiently rejoiced over. Adam's eating of the
forbidden fruit, many theologians had observed,
contained in itself all other sins; as the
violation by a rational creature of a command
imposed by infinite wisdom, and as the frustra-
tion of the divine purpose in the creation of the
earth, its sinfulness was infinite; and by it
the entire race became corrupted and estranged
from God. Yet if it had never occurred, the in-
carnation and Redemption could never have
occurred. These sublime mysteries would have had
no occasion and no meaning; and therefore the
plenitude of the divine goodness and power could
neither have been exercised nor have become
known to men. No devout believer could hold
that it would have never taken place; and con-
sequently, no such believer could consistently
hold that the first act of that drama, the event
from which all the rest of it sprang, was really
to be regretted. Moreover, the final state of
the redeemed, the consummation of human history,
would far surpass in felicity and in moral

excellence the pristine happiness and innocence of the first pair in Eden---that state in which, but for the Fall, man would presumably have remained. Thus Adam's sin---and also, indeed, the sins of his posterity which it "occasioned" were the conditio sine qua non both of a greater manifestation of glory of God and of immeasurably greater benefits for man than could conceivably have been otherwise.⁵

[This mystery] Milton in the words of Michael continues explaining when he says that the Father's plan to obtain good from evil is

Not by destroying Satan, but his works
 In thee and in thy Seed: nor can this be,
 But by fulfilling that which thou didst want,
 Obedience to the Law of God, impos'd
 On penaltie of death, and suffering death,
 The penaltie to thy transgression due,
 And due to theirs which out of thine will grow;
 So onely can high Justice rest appaid.
 The Law of God exact he shall fulfill
 Both by obedience and by love, though love
 Alone fulfill the Law; thy punishment
 He shall endure by coming in the Flesh
 To a reproachful life and cursed death,
 Proclaiming Life to all who shall believe
 In his redemption, and that his obedience
 Impputed becomes theirs by Faith, his merits
 To save them, not thir own, though legal works.

XII, 394-410

Adam's response points the significance of the consolation to be derived from the whole narrative:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!

⁵
 Lovejoy, "The Paradox of the Fortunate Fall,"
 pp. 162-163.

That all this good of evil shall produce,
 And evil turn to good; more wonderful
 Than that which by creation first brought forth
 Light out of darkness!

XII, 469-473

The paradox of the fall of man thus effects for the Christian his highest experience of good from the greatest of human calamities. To attain this elevated position, though, man's life must be fortified with virtuous living.

Aaside from the preview of the future which Michael gives to Adam, his long philosophical discourse furnishes man the further consolation of precepts for Christian living. Through the example of his own life and in his theology Milton stressed the importance of virtuous living for the attainment of the highest happiness. Moral life is, of course, prefaced by obedience to God:

. . . such delight hath God in Men
 Obedient to his will, that he voutsafes
 Among them to set up his Tabernacle,
 The holy One with mortal Men to dwell.

XII, 245-248

Reason is equated with virtue when Michael warns Adam that

Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyed,
 Immediately inordinate desires
 And upstart Passions catch the Government
 From Reason, and to servitude reduce
 Man till then free,

XII, 86-90

for "virtue . . . is reason."

Next to obedience and ability, reason is the moral principle of temperance from which the poet points the close

analogy between moderation and happy living. As a result of temperance, long life may accrue

Till many years over thy head return;
So maist thou live, till like ripe Fruit thou drop
Into thy Mothers lap, or be with ease,
Gatherd, not harshly pluckt, for death mature:
This is old age.

XI, 534-538

Michael fortells that

. . . th' Earth shall bear
More than enough, that temperance may be tri'd.

XI, 804-805

And through trial of faith man is to be tested

. . . to learn
True patience, and to temper joy with fear
And pious sorrow, equally inur'd
By moderation either state to beare,
Prosperous or adverse: so shalt thou lead
Safest thy life, and best prepar'd endure
Thy moral passage when it comes.

XI, 360-366

Mortal man is never assured of freedom from afflictions in this life, but he is promised consolation in adversity.

He is, therefore, to learn through the evils of life that

. . . suffering for Truths sake
Is fortitude to highest victorie,
And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life.

XII, 569-571

The real test of consolation for affliction to be derived from the paradox is to be found in the allegory of death, the final remedy, converted into a benefit. Michael makes a most definite statement concerning the death of the soul when he says concerning the ransom paid by Christ

This God-like act
Annuls thy doom, the death thou sholdst have dy'd
In sin for ever lost from life.

XII, 427-429

Once Milton has explained the divine scheme for the rescue of man from his utmost form of death, and has stressed the freedom of man's will either to reject or to accept spiritual salvation, he has done all that is required in a poem written to vindicate the providence of God. He offers hope and consolation only to "as many as offer'd life neglect not." He offers this consolation to Adam, a man already repentant and eagerly seeking to escape from sin. The kind of death that Adam's sin brought upon the human race is the most dreaded penalty that man must pay. [No man, except for a miracle or two, was to escape this dread result to the end of time. That physical death was to continue among men for a time as a result of the original curse in spite of Christ's atonement was a demand of the moral law; mercy is unable wholly to supersede justice. The plan adopted was really the result of a compromise between stern Jehovah and the Messiah.] According to the poet, man was to endure physical suffering and death, as God had solemnly said that he should. But death was to be only temporary; eventually regenerated man through patient suffering and continuance in well-doing was to find in heaven a life of transcendent happiness far superior to his life in the Garden of Eden, where he passed the days in primal

ignorance and innocence. Thus death, considered man's greatest curse, becomes through the dispensation of grace man's chief benefit. It is the transition from the life of sin to that "better life," where, says Messiah,

All my redēend may dwell in joy and bliss,
Made one with me as I with thee am one.

XI, 43-44

Under this dispensation perpetual life of the body would be the greatest of human curses, and it was a merciful motive that prompted the Almighty Ruler to announce in his "soveren will" that Adam should no longer be left within reach of the Tree of Life.⁴

The angel instructs Adam that death is only a

. . . sleep
A gentle wafting to immortal Life.
XII, 434-435

Afterwards Adam, who has learned his lesson well, uses the similar phrase:

And to the faithful Death the Gate of Life.
XII, 571

In the following speech by the Deity, the place of death and tribulation in the life of a Christian is explained:

I at first with two fair gifts
Created him endowd, with Happiness

⁴ Cecil A. Moore, "The Conclusions of Paradise Lost," PMIA, VI (1921), p. 29.

And Immortalitie; that fondly lost,
 This other serv'd, but to eternize woe;
 Till I provided Death; so Death becomes
 His final remedie, and after Life
 Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd
 By Faith and faithful works, to second Life,
 Wak't in the renovation of the just,
 Resignes him upwith Heav'n and Earth renewd.

XI, 57-66

Partial victory over sin and death is to be completed at the second coming of Christ, who will defeat Satan in a last great battle. Announcement is made by God to the angels that

Both Sin, and Death, and yawning Grave at last
 Through Chaos hurled, obstruct the mouth of Hell
 For ever, and seal up his ravenous jaws.
 Then Heaven and Earth renewed shall be made pure
 To sanctity that shall receive no stain.

X, 635-639

Though a penalty that all must pay, death is to the faithful dead an attainment of far greater good than could ever be found in this life. God promises

. . . to reward
 His faithful, and receive them into bliss,
 Whether in Heaven or Earth, for then the Earth
 Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
 Than this of Eden, and far happier days.

XII, 461-465

From neither death nor tribulations is man to find release in this life, but

Tri'd in sharp tribulation, and refin'd
 By Faith and faithful works,

XI, 63-64

he is promised peace in the midst of his sorrow.] In his final precept, Michael sums up all the virtues to be obtained in this peace by admonishing Adam to

• • . add
Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith
Add vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
By name to come call'd charitie, the soul
Of all the rest.

XII, 581-585

The comfort that Man derives from virtuous living, though, only points the way to the summum bonum of the good derived from Milton's philosophy. In himself alone, Man would be unable to resist the furious onslaughts of Satan and to endure the many afflictions of life. Only in the provision for inward strength, peace, and happiness entirely external from what happens in the world without would he find his greatest consolation. The climax of God's Providence, of the transmutation of evil into good, is the Divine provision for the Atonement.

The story essential to Milton's assertion of Eternal Providence culminates with Christ's bringing the gospel of love and Christian liberty and with His dying on the cross as a sacrifice for man. Throughout the entire poem there have been reminders that greater good is to come from evil, that Satan's triumph is not complete or final. Early in the poem the Father states that

• • . Man, as is most just,
Shall satisfie for Man, be Judg'd and die,

And dying rise, and rising with him raise
 His Brethern, ransomed with his own dear life.
 So Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate.

Love hath abounded more than Glory abounds.

III, 294-298; 311-312

In Michael's vision of the future, he foresees the greatest good that can ever be derived from evil, in Christ's triumph over Satan. In the paradox of the Son's exaltation through humiliation, the angel shows that

... thy Humiliation shall exalt
 With these thy Manhood also to this Throne.

III, 313-314

Man's chief means of consolation rests in the manifestations of love which the foreknowledge of Christ's atonement ordains. The Son is *the*

To execute fierce vengeance on his foes,
 Not so on Man; him through their malice fall'n,
 Father of Mercie and Grace, thou didst not doome
 So strictly, but much more to pitie encline.

III, 400-403

(More glorious still, He)

... offered himself to die
 For Man's offense, O unexampled love,
 Love nowhere to be found less than divine.

III, 409-412

Later, God confirms his intention to be lenient with Man by revealing to Adam his plan of redemption. The Father asks Michael to

To Adam what shall come in future dayes,
 As I shall thee enlighten, intermix
 My Cov'nant in the womans seed renewd.

XI, 113-116

The angel complies by disclosing to Adam the unfolding of God's plan in its entirety. In his prophetic history of the human race, Michael admits the inefficacy of the Mosaic law when he promises that

Some bloud more precious must be paid for Man,
Just for unjust, that in such righteousness
To them by Faith imputed, they may finde
Justification towards God, and peace
Of Conscience.

XII, 293-297

Michael becomes more earnestly dramatic as he names the Son the One "whom the Gentiles Jesus call" and prophesies further of "a Son, the Woman's Seed" "in whom shall trust all nations." When he shows how

. . . that the true
Anointed King Messiah might be born
Barr'd of his right; yet at his Birth a Starr
Unseen before in Heav'n proclaims him com,

XII, 358-359

and how

A Virgin is his Mother, but his Sire
The Power of the Most high,

XII, 368-369

Adam is surcharged with joy in the comforting knowledge that his sin, after all, may effect some good to the human race. As Michael continues the revelation of the significance of the cross, he further recounts how Christ's humiliation actually achieves exaltation, not only for himself but also for the human race. The Son

Seis'd on by force, judg'd, and to death condemn'd
 A shameful and accurst, nail'd to the Cross
 By his own Nation, slaine for bringing Life;
 But to the Cross he nailes thy enemies,
 The Law that is against thee, and the sins
 Of all mankinde, with him there crucifi'd,
 Never to hurt them more who rightly trust
 In this his satisfaction; so he dies,
 But soon revives, Death over him no power
 Shall long usurp.

XII, 412-421

Not only does the Son effect good from every situation connected with the cross, but also this act of Christ's

Shall bruise the head of Satan, crush his strength
 Defeating Sin and Death . . .
 Then to the Heav'n of Heav'ns he shall ascend
 With victory, triumphing through the aire
 Over his foes and thine; there shall surprise
 The Serpent, Prince of air, and drag in Chaines
 Through all his Realme, and there confounded leave;
 Then enter into glory, and resume
 His Seat at God's right hand, exalted high
 Above all names in Heav'n; and thence shall come,
 When this worlds dissolution shall be ripe,
 With glory and power to judge both quick and dead,
 To judge th' unfaithful dead, but to reward
 His faithful, and receive them into bliss.

XII, 430-431; 451-462

What more could even God do for mankind? The acme of consolation is reached, the miracle of miracles, and the consummation of the Providence of God. [Adam in the greatest of ecstasy is doubtful

Whether I should repent me now of sin
 By mee done and occasiond, or rejoice
 Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,
 To God more glory, more good will to Men
 From God, and over wrauth grace shall abound.]

XII, 474-478

The angel's promise of the Holy Spirit, after Christ's ascension, to provide man with inner solace and strength in the midst of the trials of life completes the plan of redemption. Michael declares that

Hee to his own a Comforter will send,
The promise of the Father, who shall dwell
His Spirit within them, and the Law of Faith
Working through love, upon their hearts shall write,
To guide them in all truth, and also arme
With spiritual Armour, able to resist
Satans assaults, and quench his fierie darts,
What man can do against them, not affraid,
Though to the death, against such cruelties
With inward consolations recompenc't.

XII, 487-496

With the provision of a Paradise to be achieved within the soul, the paradox of the fall of man is finished; God's providence has effected for Adam and for the human race all the good possible. The highest consolation to be found is, paradoxically, in the loss of an earthly paradise and the gain of a far happier paradise to be achieved within the soul, a paradise independent of the world without and attained only through the Christian virtues---humility, faith, and obedience.

CONCLUSION

That Milton achieved his purpose in justifying a Divine Providence and in providing consequent consolation to Adam and Eve and to Universal Man is the general consensus of opinion of Christian philosophers. It is true that some critics insist that the present age is far removed from the Miltonic scene, and that, therefore, the theme of the epic Paradise Lost has no meaning for the modern era. The poet's creations of Adam and Eve, nevertheless, are characteristically human as they err, repent, and accept their fate---called Divine Providence by the Christian believer---in life. Their problems are universal; the evils that the Fall occasioned still exist; and Milton's Christian philosophy in determining the best way to endure the evil consequences of the Fall or to turn them to good account has generally had acceptance through the centuries. To the person who has listened to the slow cadence of the solemn music of the epic, interpreted the meaning of the rendition, and been moved in his own soul by the sweeping harmony, the theme of Divine Providence has particular significance, and the music is essentially consoling.

Milton's success in his development of Paradise Lost rests both upon the choice of theme and upon the Christian

epic structure which he chose for his purpose. Although he was entirely impersonal in the poem, his own experiences and the richness of his own life contributed much to the beauty and the meaning of his creation. His high ethical and scholarly attributes combined to form a basis for a poem of high worth and intellectual perfection. To a large extent, however, the interest in the poem lies in the narrative element---in the struggle between Satan and God and in the destiny of the human soul.

Much of the interest in the epic is derived from the fact that the narrative extends beyond the limits of the poem. [The end of the epic was the beginning of new hopes, a better understanding of the meaning of life, and a Christian outlook of faith and purpose.] Christian philosophers long before Milton had worked out a similar theology to satisfy their own needs and to expel doubts. The consolation derived from a perusal of the poem, however, provides added incentives for trusting Divine Providence. [Like Adam and Eve as they faced an entirely new environment in their departure from the Garden of Eden, the Universal Christian also has the comforting knowledge

That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good.

XII, 470-471

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