

Milton Not a Mere Puritan. His
Classicism

It would, however, be wrong to regard Milton only as Puritan. A Puritan he certainly was, but a Puritan with difference. The puritan spirit was, as has been said above, antagonistic to the artistic and literary, but Milton was not only a great Puritan but also a great artist possessing a keen sense of beauty and a fine scholarship. His classical training and spirit saved him from the odious and ridiculous traits of undiluted Puritanism. God was to him not, as to most Puritans, the God of righteousness alone, but the God of beauty too. The average Puritan held that the Bible was sufficient and condemned as frivolous the study of the pagan classics. But Milton as we have seen, was deeply read in the classical literature of Greece

and Rome and thoroughly steeped in its spirit. Its influence is perceptible in the wealth of classical allusions which abound in his poems in his sense of form and style. His ~~obscure~~ illustrations, his rhetoric, his dignity, his self-restraint, his very constructions and vocabulary are derived from the classics. He was thus, as has been happily said, a child of the Renaissance as well as of Puritanism. In him the Puritanic zeal for righteousness was combined with the feeling for beauty and love of knowledge which distinguished the Renaissance spirit. Hence we find his poetry informed as much with a sense of beauty as with a spirit of religious piety. And the Sonnets we shall study are full of classical allusions and reminiscences of thoughts and phrases from the classical

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authors as well as of Biblical allusions and reminiscences, though the proportion of the latter is seen to be increasing in the later sonnets ~~text~~ which also is significant.

The end.

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