

**ANNOTATED POEMS
OF ENGLISH
AUTHORS. L'ALLEGRO**

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Annotated Poems of English Authors. L'Allegro by John Milton & Rev. E. T. Stevens & Rev. D. Morris

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JOHN MILTON & REV. E. T. STEVENS & REV. D. MORRIS

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Now in course of publication, in crown 8vo.

ANNOTATED POEMS
OF
ENGLISH AUTHORS.

EDITED BY THE

Rev. EDWARD THOMAS STEVENS, M.A. Oxford,
Joint-Editor of 'The Grade Lesson-Books,' 'The Useful Knowledge
Series,' &c. and the

Rev. DAVID MORRIS, B.A. London,
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L'ALLEGRO
BY JOHN MILTON



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JOHN MILTON.

JOHN MILTON, a poet of the first rank, was born in London in 1608, and died in 1674. His ancestors derived their name from the estate of Milton, near Thame, in Oxfordshire, of which they were the proprietors.¹ He was educated at St. Paul's School, London, and Christ's College, Cambridge, and was ultimately appointed Latin Secretary to Oliver Cromwell and the Parliament. The last twenty years of his life were spent in total blindness; and yet during this period he composed his most important poem, 'Paradise Lost.' He wrote also many other works, both in poetry and prose, the chief of which are 'Paradise Regained,' 'Comus' (a mask, or play, performed at Ludlow Castle, in 1634, before the Earl of Bridgewater), 'L'Allegro,' 'Il Penseroso,' and 'Samson Agonistes,' with various Sonnets, Odes, and Hymns.

¹ There are two villages in this neighbourhood, Great and Little Milton, and at least twelve others, in various parts of England, bearing the same name.

CRITICISM
ON
'L'ALLEGRO' AND 'IL PENSEROSO.'

DR. JOHNSON says, 'Of the two pieces "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," I believe, opinion is uniform; every man that reads them, reads them with pleasure. The author's design is not, what Theobald has remarked, merely to show how objects derive their colours from the mind, by representing the operation of the same things upon the gay and the melancholy temper, or upon the same man as he is differently disposed; but rather how, among the successive variety of appearances, every disposition of mind takes hold on those by which it may be gratified.

'The *cheerful* man hears the lark in the morning; the *pensive* man hears the nightingale in the evening. The *cheerful* man sees the cock strut, and hears the horn and hounds echo in the wood; then walks, *not unseen*, to observe the glory of the rising sun, or listens to the singing milkmaid, and views the labours of the ploughman and the mower; then casts his eyes about him over scenes of smiling plenty, and looks up to the distant tower, the residence of some fair inhabitant: thus he pursues real gaiety through a day of labour or of play, and delights himself at night with the fanciful narratives of *superstitious ignorance*.

'The *pensive* man, at one time, walks *unseen* to muse

Criticism on 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso.' 7

at midnight ; and, at another, hears the sullen curfew. If the weather drives him home, he sits in a room lighted only by *glowing embers*, or by a lonely lamp outwatches the North Star, to discover the habitation of separate souls, and varies the shades of meditation by contemplating the magnificent or pathetic scenes of tragic and epic poetry. When the morning comes, a morning gloomy with rain and wind, he walks into the dark trackless woods, falls asleep by some murmuring water, and with melancholy enthusiasm expects some dream of prognostication, or some music played by aerial performers.

‘Both Mirth and Melancholy are solitary, silent inhabitants of the breast, that neither receive nor transmit communication : no mention is therefore made of a philosophical friend, or a pleasant companion. The seriousness does not arise from any participation of calamity, nor the gaiety from the pleasures of the bowl.

‘The man of *cheerfulness*, having exhausted the country, tries what *towered* cities will afford, and mingles with scenes of splendour—gay assemblies and nuptial festivities : but he mingles a mere spectator, as, when the learned comedies of Jonson, or the wild dramas of Shakespeare, are exhibited, he attends the theatre.

‘The *pensive* man never loses himself in crowds, but walks the cloister, or frequents the cathedral. Milton probably had not yet forsaken the Church.

‘Both his characters delight in music ; but he seems to think that cheerful notes would have obtained from Pluto a complete dismissal of Eurydice, of whom solemn sounds only procured a conditional release.

‘For the old age of cheerfulness he makes no provision ; but melancholy he conducts with great dignity to the