Mr. Masson assures us that "there are touches in this description (as, for example, the _ordering of arms at the moment of halt, and without word of command) too exact and technical to have occurred to a mere civilian. Again, at the same review....

"He now prepared
To speak; whereat their doubled ranks they bend
From wing to wing, and half enclose him round
With all his peers; _attention held them mute.'(360)

"To the present day this is the very process, or one of the processes, when a commander wishes to address his men. They wheel inward and stand at 'attention.'" But his main argument is the phrase "_ported spears," in Book Fourth, on which he has an interesting and valuable comment. He argues the matter through a dozen pages or more, seeking to prove that Milton _must have had some practical experience of military drill. I confess a very grave doubt whether "attention" and "ordered" in the passages cited have any other than their ordinary meaning, and Milton could never have looked on at the pike-exercise without learning what "ported" meant. But, be this as it may, I will venture to assert that there was not a boy in New England, forty years ago, who did not know more of the manual than is implied in Milton's use of these terms. Mr. Masson's object in proving Milton to have been a proficient in these martial exercises is to increase our wonder at his not entering the army. "If there was any man in England of whom one might surely have expected that he would be in arms among the Parliamentarians," he says, "that man was Milton." Milton may have had many an impulse to turn soldier, as all men must in such times, but I do not believe that he ever seriously intended it. Nor is it any matter of reproach that he did not. It is plain, from his works, that he believed himself very early set apart and consecrated for tasks of a very different kind, for services demanding as much self-sacrifice and of more enduring result. I have no manner of doubt that he, like Dante, believed himself divinely inspired with what he had to utter, and, if so, why not also divinely guided in what he should do or leave undone? Milton wielded in the cause he loved a weapon far more effective than a sword.

It is a necessary result of Mr. Masson's method, that a great deal of space is devoted to what might have befallen his hero and what he might have seen. This leaves a broad margin indeed for the insertion of purely hypothetical incidents. Nay, so desperately addicted is he to what he deems the vivid style of writing, that he even goes out of his way to imagine what might have happened to anybody living at the same time with Milton. Having told us fairly enough how Shakespeare, on his last visit to London, perhaps saw Milton "a fair child of six playing at his father's door," he must needs conjure up an imaginary supper at the Mermaid. "Ah! what an evening ... was that; and how Ben and
Shakespeare be-tongued each other, while the others listened and wondered; and how, when the company dispersed, the sleeping street heard their departing footstepes, and the stars shone down on the old roiefs. Certainly, if we may believe the old song, the stars "had nothing else to do," though their chance of shining in the middle of a London November may perhaps be reckoned very doubtful. An author should consider how largely the art of writing consists in knowing what to leave in the inkstand.

Mr. Masson's volumes contain a great deal of very valuable matter, whatever one may think of its bearing upon the life of Milton. The chapters devoted to Scottish affairs are particularly interesting to a student of the Great Rebellion, its causes and concomitants. His analyses of the two armies, of the Parliament, and the Westminster Assembly, are sensible additions to our knowledge. A too painful thoroughness, indeed, is the criticism we should make on his work as a biography. Even as a history, the reader might complain that it confuses by the multiplicity of its details, while it wearsies by want of continuity. Mr. Masson lacks the skill of an accomplished story-teller. A fact is to him a fact, never mind how unessential, and he misses the breadth of truth in his devotion to accuracy. The very order of his title-page, "The Life of Milton, narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time," shows, it should seem, a misconception of the true nature of his subject. Milton's chief importance, it might be fairly said his only importance, is a literary one. His place is fixed as the most classical of our poets.

Neither in politics, theology, nor social ethics, did Milton leave any distinguishable trace on the thought of his time or in the history of opinion. In both these lines of his activity circumstances forced upon him the position of a controversialist whose aims and results are by the necessity of the case desultory and ephemeral. Hooker before him and Hobbes after him had a far firmer grasp of fundamental principles than he. His studies in these matters were perfunctory and occasional, and his opinions were heated to the temper of the times and shaped to the instant exigencies of the forum, sometimes to his own convenience at the moment, instead of being the slow result of a deliberate judgment enlightened by intellectual and above all historical sympathy with his subject. His interest was rather in the occasion than the matter of the controversy. No aphorisms of political science are to be gleaned from his writings as from those of Burke. His intense personality could never so far dissociate itself from the question at issue as to see it in its larger scope and more universal relations. He was essentially a _doctrinaire_, ready to sacrifice everything to what at the moment seemed the abstract truth, and with no regard to historical antecedents and consequences, provided those of scholastic logic were carefully observed. He has no respect for usage or tradition except when they count in his favor, and sees no virtue in that power of the past over the minds and conduct of men which alone insures the continuity of national growth and is the great safeguard of order and progress. The life of a nation was of less importance to him than that it should be conformed to certain principles of belief and conduct. Burke could distill political wisdom out of history because he had a profound consciousness of the soul that underlies and outlives events, and of the national character that gives them meaning and coherence. Accordingly his words are still living and operative, while Milton's pamphlets are strictly occasional and no longer interesting except as they illustrate him. In the Latin ones especially there is an odd mixture of the pedagogue and the public orator. His training, so far as it was thorough, so far, indeed, as it may be called optional, was purely poetical and artistic. A true Attic bee, he made boot on every lip where there was a trace of truly classic honey.

Milton, indeed, could hardly have been a match for some of his antagonists in theological and ecclesiastical learning. But he brought into the contest a white heat of personal conviction that counted for much. His self-consciousness, always active, identified him with the cause he undertook. "I conceived myself to be now not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded and whereof I had declared myself openly to be the partaker."(361) Accordingly it does not so much seem that he is the advocate of Puritanism, Freedom of Conscience, or the People of England, as that all these are _he_, and that he is speaking for himself. He was not nice in the choice of his missiles, and too often borrows a dirty lump from the dunghill of Luther; but now and then the gnarled sticks of controversy turn to golden arrows of Phoebus in his trembling hands, singing as they fly and carrying their messages of doom in music. Then, truly, in his prose as in his verse, his is the large utterance of the early gods, and there is that in him which tramples all learning under his victorious feet. From the first he looked upon himself as a man dedicated and set apart. He had that sublime persuasion of a divine mission which sometimes lifts his speech from personal to cosmopolitan significance; his genius unmistakably asserts itself from time to time, calling down fire from heaven to
kindle the sacrifice of irksome private duty, and turning the hearthstone of an obscure man into an altar for the worship of mankind. Plainly enough here was a man who had received something other than Episcopal ordination. Mysterious and awful powers had laid their unimaginable hands on that fair head and devoted it to a nobler service. Yet it must be confessed that, with the single exception of the "Areopagitica," Milton's tracts are wearisome reading, and going through them is like a long sea-voyage whose monotonity is more than compensated for the moment by a stripe of phosphorescence heaping before you in a drift of star-sown snow, coiling away behind in winking disks of silver, as if the conscious element were giving out all the moonlight it had garnered in its loyal depths since first it gazed upon its pallid regent. Which, being interpreted, means that his prose is of value because it is Milton's, because it sometimes exhibits in an inferior degree the qualities of his verse, and not for its power of thought, of reasoning, or of statement. It is valuable, where it is best, for its inspiring quality, like the fervencies of a Hebrew prophet. The English translation of the Bible had to a very great degree Judaized, not the English mind, but the Puritan temper. Those fierce enthusiasts could more easily find elbow-room for their consciences in an ideal Israel than in a practical England. It was convenient to see Amalek or Philistia in the men who met them in the field, and one unintelligible horn or other of the Beast in their theological opponents. The spiritual provincialism of the Jewish race found something congenial in the English mind. Their national egotism quintessentialized in the prophets was especially sympathetic with the personal egotism of Milton. It was only as an inspired and irresponsible person that he could live on decent terms with his own self-confident individuality. There is an intolerant egotism which identifies itself with omnipotence, and whose sublimity is its apology; there is an intolerable egotism which subordinates the sun to the watch in its own fob. Milton's was of the former kind, and accordingly the finest passages in his prose and not the least fine in his verse are autobiographic, and this is the more striking that they are often unconsciously so. Those fallen angels in utter ruin and combustion hurled, are also cavaliers fighting against the Good Old Cause; Philistia is the Restoration, and what Samson did, that Milton would have done if he could.

The "Areopagitica" might seem an exception, but that also is a plea rather than an argument, and his interest in the question is not one of abstract principle, but of personal relation to himself. He was far more rhetorician than thinker. The sonorous amplitude of his style was better fitted to persuade the feelings than to convince the reason. The only passages from his prose that may be said to have survived are emotional, not argumentative, or they have lived in virtue of their figurative beauty, not their weight of thought. Milton's power lay in dilation. Touched by him, the simplest image, the most obvious thought,

"Dilated stood
Like Teneriffe or Atlas....
.... nor wanted in his grasp
What _seemed both spear and shield."

But the thin stiletto of Macchiavelli is a more effective weapon than these fantastic arms of his. He had not the secret of compression that properly belongs to the political thinker, on whom, as Hazlitt said of himself, "nothing but abstract ideas makes any impression." Almost every aphoristic phrase that he has made current is borrowed from some one of the classics, like his famous

"License they mean when they cry liberty,"

from Tacitus. This is no reproach to him so far as his true function, that of poet, is concerned. It is his peculiar glory that literature was with him so much an art, an end and not a means. Of his political work he has himself told us, "I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein, knowing myself inferior to myself (led by the genial power of nature to another task), I have the use, as I may account, but of my left hand."

Mr. Masson has given an excellent analysis of these writings, selecting with great judgment the salient passages, which have an air of blank-verse thinly disguised as prose, like some of the corrupted passages of Shakespeare. We are particularly thankful to him for his extracts from the pamphlets written against Milton, especially for such as contain criticisms on his style. It is not a little interesting to see the most stately of poets reproached for his use of vulgarisms and low words. We seem to get a glimpse of the schooling of his "choiceful sense" to that nicety which could not be
content till it had made his native tongue "search all her coffers round." One cannot help thinking also that his practice in prose, especially in the long involutions of Latin periods, helped him to give that variety of pause and that majestic harmony to his blank-verse which have made it so unapproachably his own. Landor, who, like Milton, seems to have thought in Latin, has caught somewhat more than others of the dignity of his gait, but without his length of stride. Wordsworth, at his finest, has perhaps approached it, but with how long an interval! Bryant has not seldom attained to its serene equanimity, but never emulates its pomp. Keats has caught something of its large utterance, but altogether fails of its nervous severity of phrase. Cowper's muse (that moved with such graceful ease in slippers) becomes stiff when (in his translation of Homer) she buckles on her feet the cothurnus of Milton. Thomson grows tumid wherever he assays the grandiosity of his model. It is instructive to get any glimpse of the slow processes by which Milton arrived at that classicism which sets him apart from, if not above, all our other poets.

In gathering up the impressions made upon us by Mr. Masson's work as a whole, we are inclined rather to regret his copiousness for his own sake than for ours. The several parts, though disproportionate, are valuable, his research has been conscientious, and he has given us better means of understanding Milton's time than we possessed before. But how is it about Milton himself? Here was a chance, it seems to me, for a fine bit of portrait-painting. There is hardly a more stately figure in literary history than Milton's, no life in some of its aspects more tragical, except Dante's. In both these great poets, more than in any others, the character of the men makes part of the singular impressiveness of what they wrote and of its vitality with after times. In them the man somehow overtops the author. The works of both are full of autobiographical confidences. Like Dante, Milton was forced to become a party by himself. He stands out in marked and solitary individuality, apart from the great movement of the Civil War, apart from the supine acquiescence of the Restoration, a self-opinionated, unforgiving, and unforgetting man. Very much alive he certainly was in his day. Has Mr. Masson made him alive to us again? I fear not. At the same time, while we cannot praise either the style or the method of Mr. Masson's work, we cannot refuse to be grateful for it. It is not so much a book for the ordinary reader of biography as for the student, and will be more likely to find its place on the library-shelf than the centre-table. It does not in any sense belong to light literature, but demands all the muscle of the trained and vigorous reader. "Truly, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is Milton's life it is naught."

Mr. Masson's intimacy with the facts and dates of Milton's career renders him peculiarly fit in some respects to undertake an edition of the poetical works. His edition, accordingly, has distinguished merits. The introductions to the several poems are excellent and leave scarcely anything to be desired. The general Introduction, on the other hand, contains a great deal that might well have been omitted, and not a little that is positively erroneous. Mr. Masson's discussions of Milton's English seem often to be those of a Scotsman to whom English is in some sort a foreign tongue. It is almost wholly inconclusive, because confined to the Miltonic verse, while the basis of any altogether satisfactory study should surely be the Miltonic prose; nay, should include all the poetry and prose of his own age and of that immediately preceding it. The uses to which Mr. Masson has put the concordance to Milton's poems tempt one sometimes to class him with those whom the poet himself taxed with being "the mousehunts and ferrets of an index." For example, what profits a discussion of Milton's (Greek: hapax legomena), a matter in which accident is far more influential than choice?(363) What sensible addition is made to our stock of knowledge by learning that "the word _woman does not occur in any form in Milton's poetry before 'Paradise Lost,'" and that it is "exactly so with the word _female_"? Is it any way remarkable that such words as _Adam, God, Heaven, Hell, Paradise, Sin, Satan_, and _Serpent should occur "very frequently" in "Paradise Lost"? Would it not rather have been surprising that they should not? Such trifles at best come under the head of what old Warner would have called cumber-minds. It is time to protest against this minute style of editing and commenting great poets. Gulliver's microscopic eye saw on the fair skins of the Brobdignagian maids of honor "a mole here and there as broad as a trencher," and we shrink from a cup of the purest Hippocrene after the critic's solar microscope has betrayed to us the grammatical, syntactical, and, above all, hypothetical monsters that sprawl in every drop of it. When a poet has been so much edited as Milton, the temptation of whosoever undertakes a new edition to see what is not to be seen becomes great in proportion as he finds how little there is that has not been seen before.

Mr. Masson is quite right in choosing to modernize the spelling of Milton, for surely the reading of our classics should be made as little difficult as possible, and he is right also in making an exception of such abnormal forms as the poet
may fairly be supposed to have chosen for melodic reasons. His exhaustive discussion of the spelling of the original editions seems, however, to be the less called-for as he himself appears to admit that the compositor, not the author, was supreme in these matters, and that in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases to the thousand Milton had no system, but spelt by immediate inspiration. Yet Mr. Masson fills nearly four pages with an analysis of the vowel sounds, in which, as if to demonstrate the futility of such attempts so long as men's ears differ, he tells us that the short _a sound is the same in _man and _Darby_, the short _o sound in _God and _does_, and what he calls the long _o sound in _broad and _wrath_. Speaking of the apostrophe, Mr. Masson tells us that "it is sometimes inserted, not as a possessive mark at all, but merely as a plural mark: _hero's for _heroes_, _myrtle's for _myrtles_, _Gorgons and _Hydra's_, etc." Now, in books printed about the time of Milton's the apostrophe was put in almost at random, and in all the cases cited is a misprint, except in the first, where it serves to indicate that the pronunciation was not heroes as it had formerly been.(364) In the "possessive singular of nouns already ending in _s_" Mr. Masson tells us, "Milton's general practice is not to double the _s_: thus, _Nereus wrinkled look, Glaucus spell_. The necessities of metre would naturally constrain to such forms. In a possessive followed by the word _sake or the word _side_, dislike to (of) the double sibilant makes us sometimes drop the inflection. In addition to '_for righteousness' sake_' such phrases as '_for thy name sake_' and '_for mercy sake_' are allowed to pass; _bedside is normal and _riverside nearly so._" The necessities of metre need not be taken into account with a poet like Milton, who never was fairly in his element till he got off the soundings of prose and felt the long swell of his verse under him like a steed that knows his rider. But does the dislike of the double sibilant account for the dropping of the _s in these cases? Is it not rather the presence of the _s already in the sound satisfying an ear accustomed to the English slovenliness in the pronunciation of double consonants? It was this which led to such forms as _conscience sake and _on justice side_, and which beguiled Ben Jonson and Dryden into thinking, the one that _noise and the other that _corps was a plural,(365) What does Mr. Masson say to _hillside, Bankside, seaside, Cheapside, spindleside, spearside, gospelside (of a church), _nightside, countryside, wayside, brookside_, and I know not how many more? Is the first half of these words a possessive? Or is it not rather a noun impressed into the service as an adjective? How do such words differ from _hilltop, townend, candlelight, rushlight, cityman_, and the like, where no double _s can be made the scapegoat? Certainly Milton would not have avoided them for their sibilancy, he who wrote

"And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses,"

"So in his seed all nations shall be blest,"

"And seat of Salmanasser whose success,"

verses that hiss like Medusa's head in wrath, and who was, I think, fonder of the sound than any other of our poets. Indeed, in compounds of the kind we always make a distinction wholly independent of the doubled _s_. Nobody would boggle at _mountainside_: no one would dream of saying _on the fatherside or _motherside_.

Mr. Masson speaks of "the Miltonic forms _vanquisht, markt, looke_, etc." Surely he does not mean to imply that these are peculiar to Milton? Chapman used them before Milton was born, and pressed them farther, as in _nak't and _saf't for _naked and _saved_. He often prefers the contracted form in his prose also, showing that the full form of the past participle in _ed was passing out of fashion, though available in verse.(366) Indeed, I venture to affirm that there is not a single variety of spelling or accent to be found in Milton which is without example in his predecessors or contemporaries. Even _hight_, which is thought peculiarly Miltonic, is common (in Hakluyt, for example), and still often heard in New England. Mr. Masson gives an odd reason for Milton's preference of it "as indicating more correctly the formation of the word by the addition of the suffix _th to the adjective _high_." Is an adjective, then, at the base of _growth_, _earth_, _birth_, _truth_, and other words of this kind? Horne Tooke made a better guess than this. If Mr. Masson be right in supposing that a peculiar meaning is implied in the spelling _bearth (Paradise Lost, IX. 624), which he interprets as "collective produce," though in the only other instance where it occurs it is neither more nor less than _birth_, it should seem that Milton had hit upon Horne Tooke's etymology. But it is really solemn trifling to lay any stress on the spelling of the original editions, after having admitted, as Mr. Masson has honestly done, that in all likelihood Milton had nothing to do with it. And yet he cannot refrain. On the word _voutsafe he hangs nearly a page of
dissertation on the nicety of Milton's ear. Mr. Masson thinks that Milton "must have had a reason for it," (367) and finds that reason in "his dislike to (of) the sound _ch_, or to (of) that sound combined with _s_. His fine ear taught him not only to seek for musical effects and cadences at large, but also to be fastidious as to syllables, and to avoid harsh or difficult conjunctions of consonants, except when there might be a musical reason for harshness or difficulty. In the management of the letter _s_, the frequency of which in English is one of the faults of the speech, he will be found, I believe, most careful and skilful. More rarely, I think, than in Shakespeare will one word ending in _s_ be found followed immediately in Milton by another word beginning with the same letter; or, if he does occasionally pen such a phrase as _Moab's sons_, it will be difficult to find in him, I believe, such a harsher example as _earth's substance_, of which many writers would think nothing. (With the index to back him Mr. Masson could safely say this.) The same delicacy of ear is even more apparent in his management of the _sh_ sound. He has it often, of course; but it may be noted that he rejects it in his verse when he can. He writes _Basan for Bashan_, _Sittim for Shittim_, _Silo for Shiloh_, _Asdod for Ashdod_. Still more, however, does he seem to have been wary of the compound sound _ch_ as in _church_. Of his sensitiveness to this sound in excess there is a curious proof in his prose pamphlet entitled 'An Apology against a Pamphlet, called A Modest Completion, etc.' where, having occasion to quote these lines from one of the Satires (368) of his opponent, Bishop Hall,

"Teach each hollow grove to sound his love,
Wearying echo with one changeless word,'

"he adds, ironically,'And so he well might, and all his auditory besides, with his _teach each!_" Generalizations are always risky, but when extemporized from a single hint they are maliciously so. Surely it needed no great sensitiveness of ear to be set on edge by Hall's echo of _teach each_. Did Milton reject the _h_ from _Bashan_ and the rest because he disliked the sound of _sh_, or because he had found it already rejected by the Vulgate and by some of the earlier translators of the Bible into English? Oddly enough, Milton uses words beginning with _sh_ seven hundred and fifty four times in his poetry, not to speak of others in which the sound occurs, as, for instance, those ending in _tion_. Hall, had he lived long enough, might have retorted on Milton his own

"Manli_est_, resolut_est_, br_east_,
As the magnetick hard_est iron draws,"

or his

"What moves thy inquisition?
Know'st thou not that my rising is thy fall,
And my promotion thy destruction?"

With the playful controversial wit of the day he would have hinted that too much _est-est_ is as fatal to a blank-verse as to a bishop, and that danger was often incurred by those who too eagerly _shun_ned it. Nay, he might even have found an echo almost tallying with his own in

"To begirt the almighty throne
Beseeching or besieging,"

a pun worthy of Milton's worst prose. Or he might have twitted him with "a _seq_uent king who _seeks_." As for the _sh_ sound, a poet could hardly have found it ungracious to his ear who wrote,

"Gna_sh_ing for angui_sh and despite and _sh_ame,"

or again,

"Then bursting forth
Afre_sh with con_sc_ious terrors vex me round
That rest or intermi_ssion none I find.
Before mine eyes in opposition sits
Grim Death, my son."
And if Milton disliked the _ch sound, he gave his ears unnecessary pain by verses such as these,--

"Straight cou_ch_es close; then, rising, _ch_anges oft
His cou_ch_ant wat_ch_, as one who _ch_ose his ground";
still more by such a juxtaposition as "matchless chief."(369) The truth is, that Milton was a harmonist rather than a melodist. There are, no doubt, some exquisite melodies (like the "Sabrina Fair ") among his earlier poems, as could hardly fail to be the case in an age which produced or trained the authors of our best English glee's, as ravishing in their instinctive felicity as the songs of our dramatists, but he also showed from the first that larger style which was to be his peculiar distinction. The strain heard in the "Nativity Ode," in the "Solemn Music," and in "Lycidas," is of a higher mood, as regards metrical construction, than anything that had thrilled the English ear before, giving no uncertain augury of him who was to show what sonorous metal lay silent till he touched the keys in the epical organ-pipes of our various language, that have never since felt the strain of such prevailing breath. It was in the larger movements of metre that Milton was great and original. I have spoken elsewhere of Spenser's fondness for dilatation as respects thoughts and images. In Milton it extends to the language also, and often to the single words of which a period is composed. He loved phrases of towering port, in which every member dilated stands like Teneriffe or Atlas. In those poems and passages that stamp him great, the verses do not dance interweaving to soft Lydian airs, but march rather with resounding tread and clang of martial music. It is true that he is cunning in alliterations, so scattering them that they tell in his orchestra without being obvious, but it is in the more scientific region of open-voweled assonances which seem to proffer rhyme and yet withhold it (rhyme-wraiths one might call them), that he is an artist and a master. He even sometimes introduces rhyme with misleading intervals between and unobviously in his blank-verse:--

"There rest, if any rest can harbour _there_;
And, reassembling our afflicted powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our enemy, our own loss how re_pair_,
How overcome this dire calamity,
What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not, what resolution from des_pair_."(370)

There is one almost perfect quatrain,--

"Before thy fellows, ambitious to win
From me some plume, that thy success may show
Destruction to the rest. This pause between
(Unanswered lest thou boast) to let thee know";

and another hardly less so, of a rhyme and an assonance,--

"If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge
Of hope in fears and dangers, heard so oft
In worst extremes and on the perilous edge
Of battle when it raged, in all assaults."

By James Russell Lowell