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In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

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N^o 333. *Saturday, March 22.*-----*Vocat in certamina divos.*

Virg.

WE are now entring upon the sixth book of *Paradise Lost*, in which the Poet describes the battel of Angels; having raised his reader's expectation, and prepared him for it by several passages in the preceding books. I omitted quoting these passages in my observations on the former books, having purposely reserved them for the opening of this, the subject of which gave occasion to them. The Author's imagination was so inflamed with this great scene of Action, that wherever he speaks of it, he rises, if possible, above himself. Thus where he mentions Satan in the beginning of his Poem:

-----*Him the Almighty power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless Perdition, there to dwell
In Adamantine chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.*

We have likewise several noble hints of it in the infernal conference.

*O Prince, O Chief of many throned Powers,
That led th' imbattel'd Seraphim to war,
Too well I see and rue the dire event,
That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
Hath lost us Heav'n, and all this mighty Host
In horrible destruction laid thus low.
But see the angry Victor has recall'd
His Ministers of vengeance and pursuit
Back to the gates of Heav'n: the sulphurous hail
Shot after us in storm, o'erblown hath laid
The fiery surge, that from the precipice*

Of

*Of Heaven receiv'd us falling, and the thunder
Wing'd with red lightning and impetuous rage,
Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.*

There are several other very sublime images on the same subject in the first book, as also in the second.

*What when we fled amain, pursu'd and strook
With Heav'n's afflicting thunder, and besought
The deep to shelter us; this Hell then seem'd
A refuge from those wounds —*

In short, the Poet never mentions any thing of this battel but in such images of greatness and terror as are suitable to the subject. Among several others, I cannot forbear quoting that passage, where the Power, who is described as presiding over the Chaos, speaks in the third book.

*Thus Satan; and him thus the Anarch old
With fault'ring speech, and visage incompos'd,
Answer'd, I know thee, stranger, who thou art,
That mighty leading Angel, who of late
Made head against Heaven's King, tho' overthrown.
I saw and heard; for such a numerous host
Fled not in silence through the frighted deep
With ruin upon ruin, rout on rout,
Confusion worse confounded; and Heav'n's gates
Pour'd out by millions her victorious bands
Pursuing —*

It required great pregnancy of invention, and strength of imagination, to fill this battel with such circumstances as should raise and astonish the mind of the reader; and at the same time an exactness of judgment, to avoid every thing that might appear light or trivial. Those who look into *Homer*, are surprized to find his battels still rising one above another, and improving in horror, to the conclusion of the *Iliad*. *Milton's* fight of Angels is wrought up with the same beauty. It is ushered in with such signs of wrath, as are suitable to Omnipotence incensed. The first engagement is carried on under a cope of fire, occasioned by the flights of innumerable burning darts and arrows which are discharged from either host. The second onset is still more terrible, as it is filled with those artificial thunders, which seem to make the victory doubtful, and produce

a kind of consternation even in the good Angels. This is followed by the tearing up of mountains and promontories; 'till, in the last place, the Messiah comes forth in the fulness of majesty and terror. The pomp of his appearance, amidst the roarings of his thunders, the flashes of his lightnings, and the noise of his chariot-wheels, is described with the utmost flights of human imagination.

There is nothing in the first and last day's engagement which does not appear natural, and agreeable enough to the Ideas most readers would conceive of a fight between two armies of Angels.

The second day's engagement is apt to startle an imagination, which has not been raised and qualified for such a description, by the reading of the antient Poets, and of *Homer* in particular. It was certainly a very bold thought in our author, to ascribe the first use of artillery to the rebel-Angels. But as such a pernicious invention may be well supposed to have proceeded from such authors, so it entered very properly into the thoughts of that Being, who is all along described as aspiring to the majesty of his maker. Such engines were the only instruments he could have made use of to imitate those thunders, that in all Poetry, both sacred and profane, are represented as the arms of the Almighty. The tearing up of the hills, was not altogether so daring a thought as the former. We are, in some measure, prepared for such an incident by the description of the Giant's war, which we meet with among the antient Poets. What still made this circumstance the more proper for the Poet's use, is the opinion of many learned men, that the fable of the Giant's war, which makes so great a noise in antiquity, and gave birth to the sublimest description in *Hesiod's* works, was an allegory founded upon this very tradition of a fight between the good and bad Angels.

It may, perhaps, be worth while to consider with what judgment *Milton*, in this narration, has avoided every thing that is mean and trivial in the descriptions of the *Latin* and *Greek* Poets; and, at the same time, improved every great hint which he met with in their works upon this subject. *Homer* in that passage, which *Longinus* has celebrated for its sublimeness, and which *Ovid* and *Virgil* have copied after him, tells us, that the Giants threw *Ossa* upon *Olympus*, and *Pelion* upon *Ossa*. He adds an epithet to *Pelion* (*εινσιζουλλαι*) which very much swells the Idea, by bringing up to the reader's imagination all the woods that grew upon it. There is further a great beauty in his singling out by name these three remarkable mountains, so well known to the *Greeks*. This last is such a beauty as the scene of *Milton's* war could not possibly furnish him with.

with. *Claudian*, in his fragment upon the Giants war, has given full scope to that wildness of imagination which was natural to him. He tells us, that the Giants tore up whole Islands by the roots, and threw them at the Gods. He describes one of them in particular taking up *Lemnos* in his arms, and whirling it to the skies, with all *Vulcan's* shop in the midst of it. Another tears up mount *Ida*, with the river *Enipeus*, which ran down the sides of it; but the Poet, not content to describe him with this mountain upon his shoulders, tells us that the river flowed down his back, as he held it up in that posture. It is visible to every judicious reader, that such Ideas favour more of burlesque, than of the sublime. They proceed from a wantonness of imagination, and rather divert the mind than astonish it. *Milton* has taken every thing that is sublime in these several passages, and composes out of them the following great image.

*From their foundations loosning to and fro,
They pluck'd the seated hills with all their load,
Rocks, waters, woods; and by the shaggy tops
Up-lifting bore them in their hands——*

We have the full majesty of *Homer* in this short description, improved by the imagination of *Claudian*, without its puerilities.

I need not point out the description of the fallen Angels seeing the promontories hanging over their heads in such a dreadful manner, with the other numberless beauties in this book, which are so conspicuous, that they cannot escape the notice of the most ordinary reader.

There are indeed so many wonderful strokes of Poetry in this book, and such a variety of sublime ideas, that it would have been impossible to have given them a place within the bounds of this paper. Besides that, I find it in a great measure done to my hand at the end of my Lord *Roscommon's* Essay on translated Poetry. I shall refer my Reader thither for some of the master-strokes in the sixth book of *Paradise Lost*, though at the same time there are many others which that noble Author has not taken notice of.

Milton, notwithstanding the sublime genius he was master of, has in this book drawn to his assistance all the helps he could meet with among the antient Poets. The sword of *Michael*, which makes so great a havoc among the bad Angels, was given him, we are told, out of the armory of God.

——— *But the sword
Of Michael from the armory of God*

Was

*Was given him temper'd so, that neither keen
Nor solid might resist that edge: it met
The sword of Satan with steep force to smite
Descending, and in half cut sheer——*

This passage is a copy of that in *Virgil*, wherein the Poet tells us, that the sword of *Aeneas*, which was given him by a Deity, broke into pieces the sword of *Turnus*, which came from a mortal forge. As the moral in this place is divine, so by the way we may observe, that the bestowing on a man who is favoured by heaven such an allegorical weapon, is very conformable to the old eastern way of thinking. Not only *Homer* has made use of it, but we find the Jewish Hero in the book of *Maccabees*, who had fought the battels of the chosen people with so much glory and success, receiving in his dream a sword from the hand of the Prophet *Jeremiah*. The following passage, wherein *Satan* is described as wounded by the sword of *Michael*, is in imitation of *Homer*.

*The griding sword with discontinuous wound
Pass'd through him, but th' ethereal substance clos'd
Not long divisible, and from the gash
A stream of nectarous humour issuing flow'd
Sanguine, such as celestial spirits may bleed,
And all his armour stain'd——*

Homer tells us in the same manner, that upon *Diomedes* wounding the Gods, there flowed from the wound an *Ichor*, or pure kind of blood, which was not bred from mortal viands; and that though the pain was exquisitely great, the wound soon closed up and healed in those Beings who are vested with immortality.

I question not but *Milton* in his description of his furious *Moloch* flying from the battel, and bellowing with the wound he had received, had his eye on *Mars* in the *Iliad*; who, upon his being wounded, is represented as retiring out of the fight, and making an outcry louder than that of a whole army when it begins the charge. *Homer* adds, that the *Greeks* and *Trojans*, who were engaged in a general battel, were terrified on each side with the bellowing of this wounded Deity. The Reader will easily observe how *Milton* has kept all the horror of this image, without running into the ridicule of it.

———*Where the might of Gabriel fought,
And with fierce ensigns pierc'd the deep array*

Of Moloc furious King, who him defy'd,
 And at his chariot-wheels to drag him bound
 Threaten'd, nor from the Holy One of Heaven
 Refrain'd his tongue blasphemous; but anon
 Down cloven to the waste, with shatter'd arms
 And uncouth pain fled bellowing——

Milton has likewise rais'd his description in this book with many images taken out of the poetical parts of scripture. The Messiah's chariot, as I have before taken notice, is formed upon a vision of *Ezekiel*, who, as *Grotius* observes, has very much in him of *Homer's* spirit in the poetical parts of his prophecy.

The following lines in that glorious commission which is given the Messiah to extirpate the host of rebel Angels, is drawn from a sublime passage in the psalms.

Go then thou Mightiest in thy Father's might
 Ascend my chariot, guide the rapid wheels
 That shake Heav'n's basis, bring forth all my war,
 My bow, my thunder, my almighty arms,
 Gird on thy sword on thy puissant thigh.

The Reader will easily discover many other froaks of the same nature.

There is no question but *Milton* had heated his imagination with the fight of the Gods in *Homer*, before he entred upon this engagement of the Angels. *Homer* there gives us a scene of Men, Heroes, and Gods mixed together in battel. *Mars* animates the contending armies, and lifts up his voice in such a manner, that it is heard distinctly amidst all the shouts and confusion of the fight. *Jupiter* at the same time thunders over their heads; while *Neptune* raises such a tempest, that the whole field of battel and all the tops of the mountains shake about them. The Poet tells us, that *Pluto* himself, whose habitation was in the very center of the earth, was so affrighted at the shock, that he leaped from his throne. *Homer* afterwards describes *Vulcan* as pouring down a storm of fire upon the river *Xanthus*, and *Minerva* as throwing a rock at *Mars*; who, he tells us, covered seven acres in his fall.

As *Homer* has introduced into his battel of the Gods every thing that is great and terrible in nature, *Milton* has filled his fight of good and bad Angels with all the like circumstances of horror. The shout of armies, and ratling of brazen chariots, the hurling of rocks and mountains, the earthquake, the fire, the thunder, are all of them employed to lift

up

up the reader's Imagination, and give him a suitable idea of so great an action. With what art has the Poet represented the whole body of the earth trembling, even before it was created.

*All Heaven resounded, and had Earth been then,
All Earth had to its center shook*——

In how sublime and just a manner does he afterwards describe the whole Heaven shaking under the wheels of the Messiah's chariot, with that exception of the throne of God?

———*Under his burning wheels
The steadfast Empyrean shook throughout,
All but the throne it self of God*———

Notwithstanding the Messiah appears clothed with so much terror and majesty, the Poet has still found means to make his Readers conceive an idea of him beyond what he himself was able to describe.

*Yet half his strength he put not forth, but checkt
His thunder in mid volly, for he meant
Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n.*

In a word, *Milton's* genius, which was so great in it self, and so strengthened by all the helps of learning, appears in this book every way equal to his subject, which was the most sublime that could enter into the thoughts of a Poet. As he knew all the arts of affecting the mind, he knew it was necessary to give it certain resting-places and opportunities of recovering it self from time to time: he has therefore with great address interspersed several speeches, reflections, similitudes, and the like reliefs, to diversifie his narration, and ease the attention of the Reader, that he might come fresh to his great action; and by such a contrast of ideas, have a more lively taste of the nobler parts of his description.

