

**1628**  
**AT A VACATION EXERCISE IN THE COLLEGE**  
**John Milton**

**Milton, John (1608-1674) - English poet and prose writer who is one of the most highly regarded figures in world literature and is widely considered the greatest poet since Shakespeare. Often called the "Puritan Poet," he had many of the good traits of the Puritans as well as many of the bad and spent much of his life immersed in political and religious controversy. At a Vacation Exercise (1628) - One of Milton's early minor poems. This is one of many works Milton wrote while he was at Cambridge.**

**VACATION EXERCISE**

At a Vacation Exercise in the College, part Latin, part English. The Latin speeches ended, the English thus began Anno Aetatis 19.

HAIL native Language, that by sinews weak  
Didst move my first endeavouring tongue to speak,  
And mad'st imperfect words with childish tripps,  
Half unpronounc't, slide through my infant-lipps,  
Driving dum silence from the portal dore,  
Where he had mutely sate two years before:  
Here I salute thee and thy pardon ask,  
That now I use thee in my latter task:  
Small loss it is that thence can come unto thee,  
I know my tongue but little Grace can do thee:  
Thou needst not be ambitious to be first,  
Believe me I have thither packt the worst:  
And, if it happen as I did forecast,  
The daintest dishes shall be serv'd up last.  
I pray thee then deny me not thy aide  
For this same small neglect that I have made:

But haste thee strait to do me once a Pleasure,  
And from thy wardrope bring thy chiefest treasure;  
Not those new fangled toys, and trimming slight  
Which takes our late fantasticks with delight,  
But cull those richest Robes, and gay'st attire  
Which deepest Spirits, and choicest Wits desire:  
I have some naked thoughts that rove about  
And loudly knock to have their passage out;  
And wearie of their place do only stay  
Till thou hast deck't them in thy best aray;  
That so they may without suspect or fears  
Fly swiftly to this fair Assembly's ears;  
Yet I had rather if I were to chuse,  
Thy service in some graver subject use,  
Such as may make thee search thy coffers round,  
Before thou cloath my fancy in fit sound:  
Such where the deep transported mind may soare  
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heav'ns dore  
Look in, and see each blissful Deitie  
How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,  
Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings  
To th' touch of golden wires, while Hebe brings

Immortal Nectar to her Kingly Sire:  
Then passing through the Spherse of watchful fire,  
And mistie Regions of wide air next under,  
And hills of Snow and lofts of piled Thunder,  
May tell at length how green-ey'd Neptune raves,  
In Heav'ns defiance mustering all his waves;  
Then sing of secret things that came to pass  
When Beldam Nature in her cradle was;  
And last of Kings and Queens and Hero's old,  
Such as the wise Demodocus once told  
In solemn Songs at King Alcinous feast,  
While sad Ulisses soul and all the rest  
Are held with his melodious harmonie  
In willing chains and sweet captivie.  
But fie my wandring Muse how thou dost stray!  
Expectance calls thee now another way,  
Thou know'st it must be now thy only bent  
To keep in compass of thy Predicament:  
Then quick about thy purpos'd business come,  
That to the next I may resign my Roome.

Then Ens is represented as Father of the Praedicaments his ten Sons, whereof the Eldest stood for Substance with his Canons, which Ens thus speaking, explains

Good luck befriend thee Son; for at thy birth  
 The Faiery Ladies daunc't upon the hearth;  
 Thy drowsie Nurse hath sworn she did them spie  
 Come tripping to the Room where thou didst lie;  
 And sweetly singing round about thy Bed  
 Strew all their blessings on thy sleeping Head.  
 She heard them give thee this, that thou should'st still  
 From eyes of mortals walk invisible,  
 Yet there is something that doth force my fear,  
 For once it was my dismal hap to hear  
 A Sybil old, bow-bent with crooked age,  
 That far events full wisely could presage,  
 And in Times long and dark Prospective Glass  
 Fore-saw what future dayes should bring to pass,  
 Your Son, said she, (nor can you it prevent)  
 Shall subject be to many an Accident.  
 O're all his Brethren he shall Reign as King,  
 Yet every one shall make him underling,

And those that cannot live from him asunder  
 Ungratefully shall strive to keep him under,  
 In worth and excellence he shall out-go them,  
 Yet being above them, he shall be below them;  
 From others he shall stand in need of nothing,  
 Yet on his Brothers shall depend for Cloathing.  
 To find a Foe it shall not be his hap,  
 And peace shall lull him in her flowry lap;  
 Yet shall he live in strife, and at his dore  
 Devouring war shall never cease to roare;  
 Yea it shall be his natural property  
 To harbour those that are at enmity.  
 What power, what force, what mighty spell, if not  
 Your learned hands, can loose this Gordian knot?

The next Quantity and Quality, spake in Prose, then Relation was call'd by his Name

Rivers arise; whether thou be the Son,  
 Of utmost Tweed, or Oose, or gulphie Dun,  
 Or Trent, who like some earth-born Giant spreads  
 His thirty Armes along the indented Meads,

Or sullen Mole that runneth underneath,  
Or Severn swift, guilty of Maidens death,  
Or Rockie Avon, or of Sedgie Lee,  
Or Coaly Tine, or antient hallowed Dee,  
Or Humber loud that keeps the Scythians Name,  
Or Medway smooth, or Royal Towred Thame.

- The rest was Prose-
- 

**THE END**