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POLITICAL JOURNALISM 1572-1714

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph. D.  
Faculty of Humanities, University of Kent.

August, 1969



To my parents.

## C O N T E N T S

### PREFACE

### PART ONE, 1572-1682

#### CHAPTER ONE. MARTIN MARPRELATE. ... .. p.1

A. Introduction; The Elizabethan Puritan Movement.

B. The Attack on the Bishops, 1572-1588.

- i) An Admonition to the Parliament.
- ii) Whitgift's primacy.
- iii) The Controversy over A Learned Discourse.
- iv) The Contribution of Udall and Penry.

C. Martin Marprelate, 1588-1589.

- i) The Epistle.
- ii) The Epitome.
- iii) Hay any Worke for Cooper.
- iv) Martin Junior and Martin Senior.
- v) The Protestation.

D. The Literary Wits.

- i) Pappe with a Hatchet.
- ii) Martin's Months Minde.
- iii) The Pasquil Tracts.
- iv) An Almond for a Parrat.
- v) The end of the Controversy.

E. Conclusion.

John Lilburne, Richard Overton, and William Walwyn.

- A. Introduction; the press before the Civil War.
- B. Freedom of Conscience, 1638-1646.
  - i) John Lilburne.
  - ii) William Walwyn.
  - iii) Lilburne and Prynne.
  - iv) Richard Overton - The Marpriest satires.
- C. The first Leveller pamphlets.
  - i) Lilburne's first arrest.
  - ii) Englands Birthright Justified.
  - iii) Innocency and Truth Justified.
- D. Walwyn and Thomas Edwards, 1646.
- E. The Clash with the Lords, 1646.
  - i) Lilburne's second imprisonment.
  - ii) Overton and the Lords, 1646.
- F. The Leveller party in action, 1647 - 1648.
  - i) The Large Petition and Rash Oaths Unwarrantable.
  - ii) Jonahs Cry out of the Whales Belly
  - iii) The Earnest Petition
  - iv) A Whip for the House of Lords.
- G. The Bloody Project, 1648
- H. The Leveller press campaign of 1649.
  - i) England's New Chains Discovered.
  - ii) The Hunting of the Foxes.
  - iii) The Picture of the Council of State.
  - iv) The Leveller-Independent break.
  - v) The end of Leveller journalism.
- I. Conclusion.

CHAPTER THREE. A NOTE ON THE POLITICAL WRITINGS OF JOHN MILTON ... 227

- A. The anti-prelatical tracts.
- B. Areopagitica, 1643.
- C. The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, 1649.
- D. Milton's pamphleteering after 1649.
- E. Conclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE EXCLUSION CRISIS. ... .. 260

- A. Introduction.
  - i) The Restoration; Roger L'Estrange.
  - ii) 'Dutch Libels'.
  - iii) The Country Party.
  - iv) An Account of the Growth of Popery.
- B. The Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1682.
  - i) The Popish Plot and the First Exclusion Bill.
  - ii) The Case Put Concerning the Succession of the Duke of York.
  - iii) The Petitions.
  - iv) Robert Ferguson. A Letter to a Person of Honour Concerning the Black Box.
  - v) Whig success: The second Exclusion Bill.
  - vi) The Oxford Parliament.
  - vii) A Just and Modest Vindication of the Proceedings of the two last Parliaments.
  - viii) Triumph of the Tory press.
- C. Conclusion.

## P R E F A C E

This thesis is a survey of the development of political journalism from the reign of Queen Elizabeth I to that of Queen Anne. As this field is so large I shall state here what kind of political journalism I have selected for discussion. My interest is in the pamphlet rather than the newspaper or periodical, though I have given the latter some consideration in the last section.

The pamphlets I have chosen are those that made a major impact on public opinion. I am particularly interested in the connection between political pamphleteering and party; the writers I have dealt with were all in some measure speaking for a party, and aimed to reach a wide audience and effect changes in the state. Party was important in protecting the pamphleteer and overcoming the practical problems of publishing his work; more important, the consciousness of an audience eager to read his work could give him polemic sharpness, and the confidence that his feelings were shared by others.

My object is to discuss the literary qualities of the writers I have selected in the broadest sense. I shall examine how their aims and the audience they addressed affected their style and technique, and what individual contribution they made to the journalism of their time. To do this I shall treat them in the context of the historical situation in which they wrote and of a wide background of routine political journalism. Without this knowledge of what they shared with

their audience the quality of a pamphlet can hardly be assessed.

I have paid particular attention to the activity of men of letters in political journalism, asking whether their talents brought them success, and what new qualities they added to the genre. The man of letters, however, is not the exclusive subject of this thesis; only the journalism of the reign of Queen Anne was dominated by literary figures.

The thesis is divided into two sections, the first covering a selection of pamphlets from three periods, that of the Elizabethan Presbyterian movement, the Civil War, and the Exclusion Crisis. The second section deals in greater detail with the journalism of 1710-1714. I shall summarise the writing of the years between these subjects, in order to make the necessary connections and retain a broader picture of the changes taking place. The reason for the emphasis given to the last four years of Queen Anne is that I feel the high quality of the writing of this period, particularly that of Swift and Defoe, deserves extensive treatment.

I have chosen a number of outstanding pamphleteers for detailed discussion, all connected in varying degrees with a political party. From the Elizabethan puritan movement, I have chosen Martin Marprelate; from the Civil War and Interregnum, the Leveller pamphleteers, John Lilburne, Richard Overton and William Walwyn and also John Milton; from the Exclusion Crisis, Roger L'Estrange and Robert Ferguson, and from the last four years of Queen Anne, Jonathan Swift, Daniel Defoe



and Richard Steele. The chapters on these writers will make clear the reasons for their selection.

The amount of work already done by others on my several subjects varies extremely. Up to the Exclusion Crisis the historical facts have been thoroughly researched and I have worked from others' accounts and bibliographies; my contribution has been to look more closely at my writers as political journalists. For the Exclusion Crisis and for 1710-1714 I have had to do more basic work in finding, dating and ordering pamphlets to form a coherent picture of what was happening in the press. I have indicated the kind of coverage already made in the footnotes to each chapter.

I have quoted frequently and at length from the pamphlets I am dealing with, because of the great difficulty of obtaining the majority of them.

## CHAPTER ONE

MARTIN MARPRELATEA. Introduction: The Elizabethan Puritan Movement

In the reign of Elizabeth I there was only one instance of a concerted press campaign, the attempt of the Presbyterian wing of puritanism to introduce the Calvinist form of Church government into the Elizabethan Church. No intrusion of the press into secular politics, such as the Queen's marriage or foreign policy, had the protection enjoyed by the puritans, or was accorded their measure of toleration. In 1579 John Stubbes, author of a pamphlet criticising the Queen's marriage negotiations with the Duke of Alençon, had his right hand cut off in punishment for his temerity. The Elizabethan state had almost universal national support, and criticism of royal policy was regarded as rebellion.

The Church was a different matter. The compromise of the Elizabethan Church did not go as far towards continental protestantism as many of the Marian exiles, and their powerful sympathisers among the nobility and gentry, would have liked. Few regarded the settlement as permanent; many saw it as merely a step on the way to full reformation, and had no hesitation in acting on their opinion. Andrew Marvell ironically blamed the desire for religious reform on, "The Press (that villanous engine) invented much about the same time with the Reformation, that hath done more mischief to the discipline

of our Church than all the doctrine can make amends for: 'twas a happy time when all learning was in manuscript, and some little officer...did keep the keys of the Library."<sup>1</sup> During the reign of Elizabeth the Presbyterian puritans surpassed earlier reformers in their use of the press, developing a highly effective attack on corruptions in the Church.

In the early 1570's the Elizabethan bishops became the principal target of the active puritan reformers, who were beginning to favour the introduction of the Genevan pattern of Church government created by Calvin; they may conveniently be referred to as Presbyterians, although the name was not used until the next century. These were a minority of puritans in general, but thanks to their organisation and controversial talents, they contrived to make the demand for the new Church<sup>C</sup><sub>A</sub> government, the "discipline", the centre of attention of all concerned with the Church during the early 1570's, and again after the appointment of Whitgift as primate in 1583. The broad aims that they hoped the discipline would achieve, a fully reformed Church led by a preaching ministry, attracted many who would have been unable to tolerate the full Presbyterian system. The anticlericalism always latent in English secular life linked easily

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<sup>1</sup> The Rehearsal Transposed, (1672). The Complete Works in verse and prose, of Andrew Marvell, M.P. ed. A.B. Grosart, (4 vols.; London, 1872-75) III, 7-8

with the Presbyterian attack on the riches and pride of the bishops, and the abuses of their ecclesiastical courts.

The Presbyterians still considered themselves part of the English Church; most held cures, or at least lectureships within the Church; and they did not deny the validity of its sacraments. Their common image for it was that of a maimed, but still living body. Here they must be distinguished from the separatists, who did not consider the English Church to be a true church of God at all, and formed separate "gathered" congregations of the godly without the sanction of the magistrate. The Presbyterians' aim was reform from within, to be propagated by the organisation of ministers in quasi-Presbyterian form inside the Church, by the pressure of the laity in Parliament and finally by the godly magistrate herself, who had a duty to institute the form of discipline prescribed by God for his Church. The Presbyterians concentrated their animosity on the bishops, while they preserved the opinion, half politic, half pathetically hopeful, that the Queen would favour their cause and introduce the discipline if the bishops did not deceive her as to the state of the Church. Thus though Elizabeth herself considered them seditious, since they attempted to alter the government of the Church, they thought themselves her most loyal subjects, and insisted on the absolute right of the civil authority to obedience. They protested with sincerity that they never advocated the revolutionary views of the continental anabaptists, (which they were often accused

of doing), and in their personal feelings towards the Queen they were prone to idolise her as her other subjects.

It would not be an exaggeration to see in the Presbyterians the embryonic form of a political party pressing for change by peaceful channels. This aspect of Elizabethan puritanism had been discussed at length by Patrick Collinson,<sup>1</sup> who has shown that the ministers were supported by enthusiastic congregations as well as by their patrons among the nobility and gentry. The Presbyterians realised that they could only succeed by convincing as many people as possible of the justice of their cause, and they made the press one of their main instruments in doing so. I shall briefly examine their attack on the bishops, to show how it prepared the way for the Marprelate Tracts, and how it differed from them in its character.

#### B. The Attack on the bishops, 1572-1588

##### (i) An Admonition to the Parliament

The pamphlet that marked the beginning of a new and specifically Presbyterian attack on the bishops was An Admonition to the Parliament, published during the Parliament of 1572, in which an attempt was to be made by a few members to bring in the full Presbyterian system. An Admonition to the Parliament was a brief summary of the abuses that the advance guard of the puritans desired to see reformed, and its

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<sup>1</sup> The Elizabethan Puritan Movement, (London, 1967)

content had been agreed on by a group of ministers meeting in London. It was written by two ministers, John Field and Thomas Wilcox, and consisted of two parts, the Admonition itself, and A View of Popishe Abuses yet remaining in the Englishe Church, for which Godly Ministers have refused to subscribe. This referred to three articles which the bishops had recently used to test the conformity of certain ministers. It was probably the work of Field, who admitted responsibility for the "bitterness of the style."<sup>1</sup>

An Admonition to the Parliament is both concise and forcible, intended as a public manifesto rather than scholarly controversy. It opens with new hostility to the bishops, blaming them for the defects of the Church:

Two treatises yee have heere ensuing (beloved in Christ) which yee must read without parcialitie or blinde affection. For otherwise you shal neither see their meaning: nor refraine youre selves from rashly condemning of them withoute juste cause. For certaine men there are of great countenance, which wyll not lightly like of them, because they principally concerne their persons and unjuste dealings: whose credite is great, and whose friendes are manye, we meane the Lordly Lordes, Archbishops, Bishoppes, Suffraganes, Deanes, Doctors, Archdeacons, Chauncelors, and the rest of that proude generation, whose kingdome must downe, holde they never so hard: because their tyrannous Lordshippe can not stande wyth Christes kingdome. And it is the specielle mischief of oure Englishe Church, and the cheefe cause of backwardnesse, and of all breach and dissention. 2

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<sup>1</sup> Collinson, p.120

<sup>2</sup> Puritan Manifestoes, A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt (The Church Historical Society, LXXII.) ed. W.H. Frere and C.E. Douglas. (London 1907) p.5



The authors promise to catalogue the marks of a true church and the abuses that need alteration, appealing to the "godly reader" not to accept the bishops' judgement of the puritans, whom they have deprived, silenced and imprisoned for refusing to subscribe to their articles. Field and Wilcox call for strong action: "Either must we have the right ministerie of God, & a right government of his church, according to the scriptures sette up (bothe whiche we lacke) or else there can be no right religion..."<sup>1</sup> They demand a preaching ministry, ordained by fellow ministers for a particular congregation, and subject to the congregation's approval; reform of the manner of administering the sacraments; and a discipline to correct the faults of the laity. Though the doctrine of the English Church is pure, it can never be effective unless complemented by those outward signs of a true church. A large number of grievances are touched on under these three heads, including the reading ministers, ministers without cures, clerical vestments, Popish practices such as kneeling to receive communion and the use of the cross in baptism, and the notorious abuses of the ecclesiastical courts. All are supported by the lordly state of the present bishops.

Field and Wilcox play on the undeniable faults of the Church to advance the cause of the Presbyterian discipline. In A View of Popish Abuses Field shows his ironic humour, and considerable literary

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.6

ability, in the way he brings the abuses he deals with to life; here a Church service is described:

In all their order of service ther is no edification, according to the rule of the Apostle, but confusion, they tosse the Psalmes in most places like tennice balles. The people some standing, some walking, some talking, some reading, some praying by themselves, attend not to the minister. He againe posteth it over, as fast as he can gallop. For either he hathe two places to serve, or else there are some games to be played in the afternoone, as lying for the whetstone, heathnishe dauncing for the ring, a beare or a bull to be baited, or else Jacke an apes to ride on horssebacke, or an enterlude to be plaide, and if no place else can be gotton, it must be done in the churche, etc. Nowe the people sit and now they stand up. When the old Testament is read, or the lessons, they make no reverence, but when the gospel commeth, then they al stand up. For why, they thinke that to be of greatest authoritie, and are ignorante that the scriptures came from one sprite. When Jesus is named, then of goth the cappe, and downe goeth the knees with suche a scraping on the ground, that they cannot heare a good while after, so that the word is hindred, but when any other names of God are mentioned, they make no curtesie at all, as though the names of God were not equall, or as thoughe all reverence oughte to be given to the syllables. <sup>1</sup>

The brilliance of such sketches of Elizabethan life adds to the attraction of the pamphlet for the reader.

Field was also skilled in bitter and lively invective, which plays an important part in this pamphlet, arousing the reader against abuses. Here Field uses a chain of biblical references to inveigh against the reading ministers:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.29

These are emptie feeders, darcke eyes, ill workmen to hasten in the Lordes harvest messengers that cannot call, Prophets that cannot declare the wil of the Lorde, unsavery salte, blinde guides, sleepe watchmen untrustie dispensers of Gods secretes, evil dividers of the words, weake to withstand the adversary, not able to confute, and to conclude, so farre from making the man of God perfect of all good works, that rather the quite contrary may be confyrmed. 1

In contrast to this awesome note, Field can be casually colloquial, as when he remarks that the names of "Archbishops, Archdeacons, Lord Bishops, Chancelers, etc, are drawne out of the Popes shop together with their offices."<sup>2</sup>

The pamphlet is written in a style that is simple and easy to understand, quite unlike the "artificial" complexity and antithesis of the style of the literary wits. The puritans eschewed ornament in their style both on grounds of principle and for effectiveness, though they found a place for colloquial vigour, homely illustration and even touches of humour in their pamphlets. The manner of An Admonition to the Parliament probably owes much to the sermon tradition, of necessity adapted for the comprehension of a widely varied audience. It was not the first instance of a flair for exciting the interest of the reader in reforming literature; Simon Fish in The Supplication of the Beggars, written in 1529, had appealed to the anticlericalism of the laity with vigorous invective against the wealth and idleness of the religious orders, enlivened by satiric description of the covetousness and lechery of the monks and friars.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.22

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.30

Other reformers who attacked the Roman Catholics in a popular rather than academic manner were John Bale and William Turner.<sup>1</sup> Field and Wilcox were the first to bring the hostility usually reserved for Catholics into the conflict within the English Church, and to appeal to a wide audience for support against the bishops, dropping any pretence that reform was a matter of fraternal difference, and any respect for the bishops. Field in particular had a touch of the successful journalist, and his effectiveness was proved by the popularity of An Admonition, which was twice rapidly reprinted on a secret press, another result of the organisation of the London ministers.

Despite this success, the hope of immediate reforms came to nothing in Parliament owing to the opposition of the Queen; indeed, though the sympathies of the house were largely puritan, the Presbyterians among them were in a small minority. The pamphlet provided the starting point for the major controversy between John Whitgift and Thomas Cartwright, over the scriptural sanction for the discipline, which continued for the next four years. This voluminous and academic exchange helped to clarify the respective positions, but its length and complexity must have restricted its circulation to the learned.

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 62.

The small size and cheapness of An Admonition gave it a different and wider readership than Whitgift's refutation of it.<sup>1</sup>

(ii) Whitgift's Primacy

From 1576 to 1583 the archepiscopate of Grindal, who had strong puritan sympathies and was trusted by almost all reformers, meant a relaxation of the Presbyterians' efforts and a new attempt at compromise with a godly archbishop. This failed when Grindal refused to obey Elizabeth's command to stop the prophesyings, public exercises of ministers at expounding texts from the Bible, which puritans of all shades favoured for the education they imparted to the laity and ministers together. For his temerity Grindal was forbidden to carry out his functions and narrowly escaped deprivation. With the accession of Whitgift to the primacy in 1583 the struggle for uniformity was renewed. Whitgift determined to make all ministers subscribe to three articles to prove their orthodoxy. Two of them, relating to the royal supremacy and to the thirty nine articles, caused little anxiety, but the remaining one, which obliged a minister to swear that he agreed with everything in the Book of Common Prayer and would use it only, meant wholesale deprivation of moderate puritan and Presbyterian alike.

After essays at deprivation had aroused the hostility of the puritans' powerful patrons, Whitgift was forced to abandon subscription

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<sup>1</sup> This point is discussed by William Pierce in A Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts, (London, 1908) p.47-8.

for all ministers, but changed his tactics to questioning and depriving extremists, allowing moderates to continue undisturbed. As an instrument Whitgift possessed the High Commission Court, where he was able to administer an oath to examinees, and could imprison them if they refused to take it and accuse themselves by interrogatories. This "ex officio" oath was bitterly resented by the puritans and their sympathisers among common lawyers, and was later to be abolished by the Long Parliament. New press regulations gave Whitgift new licensing authority; no type was to be set up before a work had received ecclesiastical licence.

In response to Whitgift's attack the Presbyterian ministers' organisation was improved and tightened by John Field, who by his energy and ability had established himself as their central secretary. By now they held regular meetings, and were soon to decide to set up a form of Presbyterian discipline secretly inside the Church, for which Walter Travers compiled a book of regulations. The ministers decided to press again for reform in Parliament, and instituted surveys of parts of England to prove the deficiency in the ministry. Field received these reports, and in addition kept records of the silencing and deprivation of the puritan ministers, and their clashes with the bishops. He at least realised that the Presbyterian system would have to depend on the strength of its supporters rather than on miraculous intervention from the Queen. When questioned by a fellow minister he replied, "Tush Mr. Edmunds, hold your peace, seeing we



cannot compass these things by suit nor dispute, it is the multitude and people that must bring the discipline to pass which we desire."<sup>1</sup>

Again the press came into action, now in conjunction with puritan lawyers who questioned the authority of Whitgift to demand subscription to his articles, or to silence, deprive and imprison ministers, avoiding the moral process of the common law by acting through the High Commission Court. An Abstract of Certain Acts of Parliament, published in 1583, followed this line, broadening the appeal of the Presbyterians to gentry perennially opposed to the claims of prelates to jurisdiction. The other important pamphlet of this time that represented the Presbyterian ministers was A briefe and plaine declaration concerning the desires of all those faithfull ministers that have and do seeke for the discipline and reformation of the Church of England. It is usually referred to by its headline, A Learned discourse of ecclesiastical government, and was the work of William Fulke; it offers a concise exposition of the Presbyterian system of Church government. Uncontroversial in tone if not in content, it was intended to provide an accessible and readable version of the discipline and its scriptural "proofs" for the benefit of those not able or willing to follow the disputes of the theologians.

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<sup>1</sup> Collinson, p.292

The work had been written some years before, but had been held back by the London ministers during Grindal's archepiscopate; Field was instrumental in getting it published to renew the Presbyterian challenge, and may have written its preface.<sup>1</sup>

Both of these pamphlets provoked further controversy but while this was in progress two more Parliaments pressed unsuccessfully for reform. Field's survey of the ministry was partly ready by the Parliament of 1587-8, and some material was set before the members. The ministers also organised petitions in favour of those imprisoned and deprived by Whitgift, which were received with sympathy by the Commons. There is some evidence of electioneering carried on to ensure the election of puritan gentry to the house; before the elections the leader of the Dedham classis wrote to Field: "I hope you have not let slip this notable opportunity of furthering the cause of religion by noting out all the places of government in the land for which burgesses for the Parliament are to be chosen, and using all the best means you can possibly...<sup>for</sup>procuring the best gentlemen of those places, by whose wisdom and seal God's causes are to be preferred. Confer among yourselves how it may best be compassed."<sup>2</sup> In this Parliament a small group of members, including Peter Wentworth and Job Throckmorton, concerted measures with a

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<sup>1</sup> Collinson, p.274

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Neale, Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments, 1584-1601 (London, 1957) p.147.

specially summoned synod of ministers in London and attempted again to introduce "a Bill and a Book" which would have given Parliamentary sanction to the discipline.<sup>1</sup> With admirable concerted effort this group achieved surprising successes in a puritan house, but the general feeling extended only as far as reform, and not to approving a total change. The Queen and her counsellors acted with speed, exposing the extremism of the measures, imprisoning their authors on the charge of holding meetings outside Parliament. This gave the Presbyterians their most decisive defeat, and meant the end of the movement in Parliament. In the next Parliament the Moderates could only try to resist the growing repression; it was quite clear that authority would countenance no alteration of the Church.

(iii) The Controversy over a Learned Discourse

While the Parliamentary agitation ran into difficulty and Whitgift continued his policy of removing the most active of his apponents, the Presbyterian press grew harsher still in its treatment of the bishops, and more obviously aimed at whipping up popular support. I shall discuss the immediate controversy that led to the Marprelate tracts, showing how Martin's methods are foreshadowed by the recognised Presbyterian movement that afterwards disowned him.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.148

In 1587 John Bridges, Dean of Arum, published the episcopal reply to A Learned Discourse, expanding his answer to a full defence of the English establishment. His book, entitled A Defence of the Government Established reached 1400 quarto pages and included replies to the arguments of Calvin and Beza. Bridges's theological arguments were not without merit, but the manner in which he wrote was totally different from that of the author he set out to confute; his massive work contrasted ludicrously with the 140 small pages of A Learned Discourse. Bridges's heavy style, his cumbersome sentences, loaded with qualifications, and his involved reasoning, are of little importance compared with his failure to realise that his book would not reach most of the readers of A Learned Discourse. He had answered an attempt at wide circulation with a treatise for scholarly theologians.

There were two replies to Bridges from the London ministers before that of Martin Marprelate. Their authors, Dudley Fenner and Walter Travers, were both central figures in the movement and among its best minds, and their replies make an interesting contrast with that of Martin. Fenner replied to Bridges's preface, in particular to refute the attack on Presbyterian ministers who had refused to subscribe to Whitgift's articles. Travers replied to a different portion; Fenner and he were presumably working in conjunction, as Fenner writes of those who will answer Bridges as "we", and announces that A Defence of the Government Established will be answered in

sections, because of its length. Fenner divides his pamphlet,

A Defence of the Godlie Ministers into these three parts:

1. The lawful authority of her Majesty is defended by the Scriptures.
2. The lawful refusing of some of the ministers to subscribe, is maintained.
3. The proposed form of church-government is proved by syllogism.

On the first point Fenner is concerned to deny Bridges's assertion that church government was a matter solely for the Queen to decide, and that the puritans denied her prerogative by claiming otherwise. Eager to avoid any implication of disloyalty, Fenner emphasises that the magistrate has a God-given right to rule the Church as well as the state, and even to displace unsatisfactory ministers. However the government of the Church is a matter decided by the scripture, which the magistrate cannot alter, and indeed has a duty to follow. In ecclesiastical causes the ministers are the best interpreters of the scripture, and the godly magistrate should be prepared to take their advice. The argument that this does not diminish the prerogative is hardly viable, but Fenner's interpretation is in line with that of Calvin, and his assertion that the ministers did not desire to take over the functions of the civil magistrate in ordering the Church was correct. For the puritans this was a vital point; their assumption that the Queen was being kept in ignorance of the true state of the Church by the bishops was beginning to wear thin. We shall see Marprelate's handling of the matter later.

Fenner treats Bridges sharply and sardonically; "Of the writer we wil say no more but that which thou shalt finde by experience, That as is a battered Citie without Walles, so is hee that can not rule his affections."<sup>1</sup> He is capable of the odd ironic comment: "Mr. Bridges could not be ignorant (I thinke) that euerie part of this Sillogisme is not without a great scare" [scar].<sup>2</sup> Fenner returns Bridges's censure of the puritans back on the bishops, blaming them squarely for the corruptions of the Church!

But your lamentations and threatnings are diuerted not only from the orders and lawes which you make your common sanctuarie to defende you in all your iniquities, but also from your selues, your Nonresidencie, double benefices, loytering, Courting, your bitter and publike inueighing against your brethren, and inticing of the Magistrate against them, the ignorance of your Ministers, their euill example of life and conuersation, which are the feeders and nourishers of the capitall sinnes you speake of? For what nourisheth more the lust of the fleshe and the eyes, then the wante of the daily ministerie of the worde, which should not onelie gather vs to holines of life in Christ, but buylde vs <sup>vp</sup> vnto perfection of sanctification? Agayne, it is manifest, that nothing can more take away the fruite of your threatninges, against the pryde of life, then to see so many of you hunte after great liuings, lordlie reuenewes, to forsake for that cause your flockes, monethes, yeares, yea sometimes for ever, and leaue them to hyrelinges and vnlearned men. 3

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<sup>1</sup> A Defence of the Godlie Ministers, (1587), sig. A2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.57 (pagination irregular).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, sig. B3.



in the early controversy between men who had often been fellow exiles, both puritan and episcopal writers had attempted to keep at least the appearance of a fraternal argument between those who agreed on essentials, rather than write with the venom appropriate to controversy against Catholics. An Admonition to the Parliament had been a blow to this tradition, but even Field had been reluctant to name individual bishops or resort to personal attacks. Another lively criticism of Whitgift's articles, published in 1584, explicitly refused to enter into personalities: "Such a defence therefore without offence of other... I will take in hande, as shall not make publike that which was done in priuate."<sup>1</sup>

Bridges had referred to the puritans as his brethren in his preface, though this had not prevented him from abusing them heartily at the same time. Fenner sarcastically calls Bridges, "our brother", as he ridicules such empty courtesy. More important he begins to depart from the practice of not specifying names or details when he refutes Bridges's claim that the ministers who refused subscription have been treated charitably without insult or reviling. Fenner gives a spirited account of Whitgift's conference with the London puritans, portraying the Archbishop's notoriously fiery temperament. Whitgift addresses one of the ministers:

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<sup>1</sup> The Unlawful Practices of Prelates Against Godly Ministers, the Maintainers of the Discipline of God, sig.C.1.v

Then hauing nothing further to say, hee looked stedfastlie on him, and sayde: Thou boye, beardlesse boye, yesterdaye birde, newe out of the shell, Must not the spirites of the Prophetes be subiect to the Prophetes?

About that time, two Ministers, who before had subscribed with great limitation and exception, being called for, about a letter, and well rattled by the Bishoppe, to one sayinge: Michael the Arch-angell (my Lord) gaue the Deuill no such wordes: he fiercelie turned about and saide: Michaelst thou mee? To the other saying: I beseeche you my L. let vs rather vndergoe anie punishment then so bee iudged of: He answered: Vnder-goe asse, vnder-goe goose, vnder-goe foole, as you are phantasticall in your opinions, so are you in your wordes. Where diddest thou euer reade, vnder-goe? I omitte manie vnsauorie vowes, as, If euer you preache, and doe not subscribe simplie, hange me vp at Tyborne, and such like. 1

Again we see the ability to bring a small scene to life being used to discredit the bishops. Yet despite his indignation Fenner refuses to give further factual accounts of the bishops' misdeeds, though he leaves his readers in no doubt that he could do so. One wonders if he had Field's collection of scandalous reports in mind. Marprelate was to repair this omission thoroughly in his reply to Bridges. The remainder of Fenner's tract answers points of Bridges's in detail, and restates the traditional Presbyterian position in direct argument.

Walter Travers was, next to Cartwright, the most respected figure among ministers, and was to succeed Field as London secretary when the latter died in 1588. He was the author of an authoritative account in Latin of the Presbyterian system, and of the book of

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<sup>1</sup> A Defence of the Godlie Ministers, sig. G2<sup>v</sup> - G3

discipline by which the ministers hoped to regulate their organisation within the Church. In A Defence of the Ecclesiastical Discipline (1588), Travers answered the section of Bridges's work that dealt with the assertion of A Learned Discourse that the discipline could be proved from the scriptures. Arguing on a scholarly level Travers sets out to reestablish this fundamental point. Though he writes in a simple and lucid style, and is more concise and far easier to follow than Bridges, Travers makes no other concessions to popularity. He even reproves Bridges for his rare attempts at wit of which a minister should be ashamed.

When dealing with the bishops Travers indulges in none of the invective so ably handled by Field, and to a lesser extent Fenner, but merely states soberly that they have no right to their position. Travers relies on unemotional reasoning, confident in the truth of his cause and unwilling to resort to abuse. Like Cartwright, his friend and mentor, he belonged to the older tradition of puritanism and he always felt strongly that the Church with all its faults was a true Church of God. His work restates the standard Presbyterian position with painstaking argument, and an even tone typical of his mild and attractive character.

(iv) The Contribution of Udall and Penry

It is relevant to mention here several tracts written by younger men than Travers, who were connected with the genesis of the Marprelate Tracts, though their works do not form part of the immediate

controversy. These were John Penry and John Udall, who belonged to the extremist fringe of the Presbyterian movement; their impatience for further reformation, and bitter hatred for the bishops, were the result of the rapidly worsening situation of the puritan ministers. Penry had written a tract on the religious condition of Wales, his home country, in 1587, in which he appealed to the Parliament to remedy the desperate need for a preaching ministry in Wales. It was presented to the House of Commons by Job Throckmorton and another puritan member, and Penry was promptly imprisoned for two months by Whitgift, for throwing doubts on the efficacy of the reading minister in helping his congregation to salvation. Penry continued his oblique attack on the bishops in An Exhortation, printed early in 1588 by Robert Waldegrave. In this tract Penry cast more doubt on the efficacy of the sacraments when administered by a reading minister, venturing further on dangerous ground than the majority of puritans would have followed.

Waldegrave followed Penry's tract with Udall's The State of the Church of England, laide open in a conference betweene Diotrephes a Byshopp, Tertullus a Papiste, Demetrius an usurer, Pandochus an Inne-keeper, and Paule a preacher of the worde of God. Diotrephes is returning from a journey to Scotland where he has been trying to subvert the Presbyterian system; he has taken with him a Catholic advisor, as best fitted to argue against the Presbyterians. Tertullus is Diotrephes's alter ego, putting ideas on how to suppress puritan

preachers into his head, providing him with reasons when he is at a loss, and assuring him of his safety if Catholicism is restored. Popular outcry has defeated their efforts in Scotland: "Because the whole land cried out for Discipline againe, and the noble men so stiffely did stand to it: and lastly, the Ministers that came home from England, dealte so boldly with the king that I was vtterly cast out wythout all hope euer to do any good there again."<sup>1</sup> Udall thus shows the English Presbyterians a way to bring about the discipline.

Paule does not spare his condemnation of the bishops; here he gives his reasons:

My meaning is this, there are three abhominations committed by them: The firste is, that they doe beare suche an enimitie against the kingdome of Iesus Christe, that they put to silence one after another, and will neuer cease (if God bridle them not) vntill they haue rooted out of the Church, al the learned godly and painfull teachers: The second is, that they enlarge the libertie of the common enemies the papists: The last is, that they commit the feeding of the flockes of Christe, vnto those that prey vpon them, and either cannot or will not labour to reclaime the wandering sheepe. So that the conclusion that may bee gathered vppon their actions, must needes be the euersion and ouerthrow of the gospell, and so consequently the bringing in of popery and atheisme. 2

Paule uncovers the worldliness of Diotrephes and the devious methods he uses to suppress the godly ministers. Diotrephes is driven to

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<sup>1</sup> The State of the Church of England (1588) ed. Edward Arber  
The English Scholar's Library, Old Series, No.5, (London, 1879), p.7  
This pamphlet is usually called Diotrephes.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.9

forsake argument for threats:

Diotr.        Awaye thou rayling hypocrite, I will talke  
with thee no longer, if I catche thee in London,  
I will make thee kiss the Clinke for this geare.

Paul         In deede the Clynke, Gate-house, White-lyon  
and the fleet, haue bin your onely argumentes  
whereby you haue proued your cause these many yeeres,  
but you shall preuaile no longer, for your wicked-  
nesse is made manifest vnto all men, which God will  
shortly repaye unto your owne bosomes seuen folde,  
but pray to God to giue you repentance, that those  
things hapen not vnto you.    1

The lively exchanges of dialogue and the well differentiated characters testify to Udall's considerable literary skill; the pamphlet was another step on the way to gaining new readers.

While Diotrephes was being printed in April 1588 Waldegrave's printing house was raided, the pamphlet discovered, and his press impounded. Waldegrave himself narrowly escaped, thoughtfully sending his wife to the house of a sympathiser with a box of type. He was an important figure in the Presbyterian movement; Collinson says of him, "To list the books which Waldegrave printed during the next two or three years (1584-7) is to give an almost complete indication of the range and character of the publications which enjoyed the imprimature of the presbyterian movement."<sup>2</sup> Most of the pamphlets I have mentioned came from his press. After the suppression of his legitimate business, Waldegrave set up the secret

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<sup>1</sup>    Ibid, p.22

<sup>2</sup>    Op. cit., p.274

press that was to print the Marprelate Tracts, working in conjunction with Penry. Together they Printed Udall's next tract, and a second edition of An Exhortation during the summer of 1588 in the house of a Mrs. Crane at East Molesey, near Udall's cure of Kingston.

The second edition of An Exhorta<sup>t</sup>ion contained considerable additions, which made Penry's hostility to the bishops still more explicit. In fifty pages addressed "To the LL of the Counsel" he blamed the bishops for the lack of religion in Wales and England, and admonished the Council to act with haste.

My Ll. be not deceiued, the Lord of Heaven is angrie wyth you, and his whole hoast for the Babilonish garments of these Achans. Retaine them no longer, if you would not fall before the enemie; When the Lorde shall plead with you, your wiues, children, families, and the whole land, with pestilence, or with bolld, as he is likely to do, for these wadges of execrable gold, it is not the pontificall Lordships of byshops, at whose commaundement the lordes sword will retorne againe into his sheath, when your gasping soules, shall cry for mercy at the Lords hands, it is not the proud, popelike Lordships of bishops, their vsurped iurisdictions, their prophane excommunications, their railing slanders against Gods truth and his seruants, their blasphemous breathing of the holye ghost vppon their Idol priests, that will driue the Lord to giue any cōfort. 1

In this new section Penry censured Bridges for employing Popish reasons in his "Whoorish cause", and with some contempt promised to

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Donald J. McGinn, John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1966), p.74.

answer him fully at a later date. McGinn has drawn attention to a perculiar erratum in the third edition, which corrects "mad Deacons or foule Priests" to "made Deacons or full Priests"; it has the appearance of pointing out for admiration a Martinesque witticism of Penry.<sup>1</sup> Penry revised and enlarged the address to the Council and published it in March 1589, from the Marprelate press, entitled A Supplication and addressed to Parliament. In the summer of 1588 the same press printed another pamphlet by Penry, A Defence of that which hath bin written.<sup>2</sup>

The pamphlet of Udall's previously mentioned as printed by Penry and Waldegrave at this time, was entitled A Demonstration of the truth of that Discipline which Christe hath prescribed in his worde for the government of his Church, in all times and places, vntill the ende of the worlde. It is a summary of the Presbyterian discipline with the principal episcopal objections stated and answered, and depends heavily, as Udall states, on the works of Cartwright and Travers's Ecclesiae Disciplinae Explicatio (1574). Udall's statement of his objection in reproducing the works of others shows the awareness of the need for something less complicated than

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<sup>1</sup> Donald McGinn, John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy, pp.77-78.

<sup>2</sup> I depend for the story of the Marprelate press, which I shall not relate in detail, on the work of Donald McGinn (op.cit.) William Pierce (A Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts, London, 1908) and Edward Arber (An Introductory Sketch to the Martin Marprelate Controversy, English Scholar's Library No.8. London, 1895).



the works of Cartwright and Travers.

Now concerning priuate men that loue the cause, som haue great affaires in hand, and haue no leasure to read the seuerall books of this argument ...some (which is the generall falte of our religious gentlemen) will take no paines to read, some are poore and not able to buie the books which might let them see the cause, al these (Ihope) may finde helpe in some measure hereby. 1

In the preface Udall gives vent to his frustration at the failure of all Presbyterian moves to get their discipline put into practice:

We haue sought to aduance this cause of God, by humble suit to the parliamente, by supplication to your Conuocation house, by writing in defence of it, and by challenging to dispute for it, seeing none of these means vsed by vs haue preuailed; If it come in by that meanes, which wil make all your heartes to ake, blame your selves; for it must preuail, maugre the mallice of all that stande against it, or such a iudgement must overtake this lande, as shall cause the eares that heare thereof to tingle.... 2

Udall's anger at the bishops is expressed with unsurpassed vehemence in an address "To the Svpposed Gouvernours of the Church of Englande":

And will you still continue in your damnable, and most deuellish course? Haue you solde your selues vnto Sathan, to fight for him vntill you be dampned in Hell with him? Haue you morgaged the saluation of your soules and bodies, for the present fruition of your pompe and pleasure, is it because you see not what you should do? 3

These pamphlets of Penry and Udall express a new mood of near-desperate anger at the bishops that was current among the younger

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<sup>1</sup> A Demonstration of Discipline, ed. Edward Arber, The English Scholar's Library, No.9 (London, 1880) p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.7

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.3

ministers, generated by repression and failure. Penry had been imprisoned, Waldegrave had lost his livelihood, and in June 1588 Udall was deprived of his Ministry at Kingston-on-Thames. A report by the man sent to replace him gives Udall's reaction, which was shared by many.

About a ffortenight before Michaelmasse [1588] last Master VDALL and I hauing conference together in a field called "the little ffield" nere Kingeston, after certen speeches vsed in choller touching his putting to silence by Doctor HONE, he sayed that it was best for them not to stopp his mouth: ffor yf they did, he would then sett himself to writing, and geue the Bishoppes suche a blowe as they neuer had the lyke in their lyves. 1

Patrick Collinson has remarked on the crisis of organised Presbyterian puritanism in 1588 that evoked such bitterness from the extremists. The death of Leicester and the weakening of the puritans' friends at court, paralleled by the rise of Whitgift, meant that the chances of a change from above grew less and less, and that the puritans might not even be able to maintain their present position. The death of Field in 1588 removed one who had the strength of character to hold the organisation together and prevent the extremists fragmenting. The logic of the separatist position, which had already attracted Penry over the matter of reading ministers, became harder to resist in the face of a determined and hostile Church order. Especially in the Midlands, where the Marprelate press was to find its home in the houses of the puritan gentry who patronised the

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<sup>1</sup> Arber, An Introductory Sketch, p.83

ministers, the mood approached hysteria. One minister wrote to another, "Buckle with the bishops, massacre the malkin ministers." His correspondent returned the advice to "take out pennyworths" of the bishops "and not die in their debt."<sup>1</sup>

Collinson considers that the mood of the Midlands was attuned to the Marprelate adventure: "There was a vague expectation of some kind of apocalyptic victory which would bring the discipline 'all in one day'; in more sober terms, a movement from within the establishment so irresistible that it would leave the bishops and their dupes high and dry."<sup>2</sup> It was in this situation that the first tract of Martin Marprelate appeared to astound the godly ministers and their opponents alike.

### C. Martin Marprelate

#### (i) The Epistle

The first two Marprelate Tracts, usually known as The Epistle and The Epitome, were printed in October and November 1588 respectively, the first at East Molesey, the second at the house of Sir Richard Knightly at Fawsley. They were parts of an answer to Bridges: The Epistle an introductory address, and The Epitome a detailed reply. The headline of The Epistle ironically advises the

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Collinson, p.389

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.389-390.

reader, "Oh read ouer D. John Bridges for it is a worthyworke," and its author announces himself as "the reverend and worthie Martin Marprelate gentleman." In the opening of the pamphlet Martin sets the tone of mocking ridicule that became the hallmark of his work:

To the right puissant and terrible Priests, my clergy masters of the Confocation-house, whether Fickers-General, worshipful Paltripolitans, or any other of the Holy League of Subscription: this work I recommend unto them with all my heart, with a desire to see them all so provided for one day, as I would wish, which I promise them shall not be at all to their hurt. 1

Martin informs his reader that Bridges has written a "most senseless book" which necessitates a new method of reply, and uses the traditional opening of a petition to plead for special consideration:

And, May it please you, if I be too absurd in any place (either in this Epistle, or that Epitome) to ride to Sarum, and thank his Deanship for it. Because, I could not deal with his book commendably, according to order, unless I should be sometimes tediously duncical and absurd. 2

Though he draws on previous puritan controversy, Martin's method of reply is radically different from that of the ministers who preceded him. The Epistle is loosely organised; Martin moves easily from answering odd points of Bridges to discussing the state of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Marprelate Tracts 1588, 1589. ed. William Pierce, (London 1911) p.18. All my quotations are taken from this edition, henceforward referred to as "Pierce, p.00". Where Pierce gives a gloss on the text I have omitted this.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.18

Church and recent puritan controversy, and by the way relates a variety of scandalous stories about the bishops and the ignorant ministers they countenance. Unlike other puritan writers Martin does not hesitate to name individual bishops and to cite witnesses for his allegations, undercutting the prelates' pretensions with ribald hilarity. I have noted in the work of Field, Udall, and Fenner, the ability to create small scenes to illustrate a point; here is Martin's account of an adventure of one of his favourite butts, John Aylmer, Bishop of London:

Can  
Bishops  
face, cog,  
lie, and  
cosen or  
no, think  
you?

Dumb  
John of  
London's  
blessing

Wo-ho-ho! Brother London, do you remember Thomas Allen and Richard Alworth, merchants of London, being executors to George Allen, sometime your grocer, but now deceased; who came to you on Easter Wednesday last, being at your Masterdom's Palace in London, having been often to speak with you before, and could not, yet now they met with you; who told you they were 'Executors unto one George Allen, sometime your grocer' and 'among other his debts we find you indebted unto him in the sum of nineteen pounds and upward,' desiring you to let them have the money, for that they were to dispose of it according to that trust he reposed in them? You answered them sweetly, after you had paused awhile, in this manner; 'You are rascals; you are villains; you are arrant knaves! I owe you nought. I have a general quittance to show.' 'Sir,' said they, 'show us your discharge, and we are satisfied.' 'No' quoth he, 'I will show you none. Go, sue me! Go, sue me!' Then said one of the merchants, 'Do you thus use us for asking our due? We would you should know we are no such vile persons.' Don John of London, hearing their answer, cried out saying, 'Hence away! Citizens?-nay, you are rascals; you are worse than wicked Mammon? So lifting up both his hands, and flinging them down again said, 'you are thieves, you are coseners; take that for a bishop's blessing, and so get you hence! But when they

would have answered, his men thrust them out of the doors. But shortly after, he perceived that they went about to bring the matter to further trial; he sent a messenger unto them confessing the debt; but they cannot get their money to this day. What reason is it they should have their money? Hath he not bestowed his liberality already upon them; Can they not be satisfied with the blessing of this brave, bouncing priest? But Brethren Bishops, I pray you tell me, hath not your Brother London a notable brazen face to use these men so, for their own, I told you Martin will be proved no liar, in that he saith that bishops are cogging and cosening knaves. 1

Such anecdotes must have appealed strongly to the streak of anti-clericalism among the gentry, always resentful of the wealth and state of the bishops. Other tales illustrate the pride and avarice, the pluralities, the ignorance and immorality of the bishops and their ministers. Particular attention is paid to the silencing and imprisoning of the puritans, and the persecution of their adherents; verbatim accounts of their examinations are printed. Prominent among the sufferers are Penry, Udall, their colleague

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.76-77

Giles Wiggington, and Waldegrave.<sup>1</sup>

The bishops are treated with unremitting disrespect. Martin invents new titles for them, calling Aylmer 'Don John of London', Bridges 'your mediocrity' or 'Mass. Dean' and Whitgift 'my Lords Grease' and 'John Cant,' abbreviating his full title to make an obvious pun. He uses Bridges's admission that the puritans were his brethren to call him, with broader humour than Fenner, 'Brother Bridges', and extends this familiarity to all the bishops. In a half humorous tone Martin repeats and outdoes all previous invective against the bishops, calling them 'proud, popish, presumptuous, profane, paltry, pestilent and pernicious Prelates.'<sup>2</sup> Here he draws

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<sup>1</sup> Where Martin obtained his information is an interesting problem. Penry told Sharpe, the bookbinder who sewed some of the tracts, that the material was part of that collected by Field, which had been found in his study after his death. (An Introductory Sketch, p.94) A witness claimed to have seen part of the material in Udall's study at Kingston, and Udall himself admitted that he had provided, though unwittingly, some of the contents of the tract and confirmed the witness's statement. (Ibid, pp.83, 90, 91). This clearly refers to a collection of scandal rather than the testimony of Udall alone. Martin declares he has seen Penry's notes of his examination before Whitgift. (Pierce, p.65). The Marprelate press was in East Molesey, and Penry, Udall and Waldegrave were engaged in its operation there; it could well be that some of Fields collections had found their way through Udall and Penry into the Tracts, given by Penry to their author. Martin's claim to have an informant in every parish, and to be able to conduct a visitation of the clergy also suggests access to the results of the Presbyterian investigations. If the collections of the godly ministers were part of Martin's source, he put them to use in a manner which they had hardly intended, but which was surely a logical extension of their purpose.

<sup>2</sup> Pierce, p.25.

attention to a set piece on Aylmer:

Well now to mine eloquence; for I can do it I tell you. Who made the porter of his gate dumb minister? Dumb John of London. Who abuseth her Majesty's subjects in urging them to subscribe contrary to law? John of London. Who abuseth the High Commission, as much as any? John of London (and Doctor Stanhope, too) Who bound an Essex minister in £200 to wear the surplice on Easter Day last? John London. Who hath cut down the elms at Fulham? John London. Who is a carnal defender of the breach of the Sabbath in all places of his abode? John London. Who forbiddeth men to humble themselves in fasting and prayer before the Lord, and then can say unto the preachers, 'Now you were best tell the people that we forbid fasts'? John London. Who goeth to bowls upon the Sabbath: Dumb, duncical John of good London, hath done all this. <sup>1</sup>

Yet Martin never leaves his reader in doubt of his real concern for reformation, confident that humour can support a serious cause. His tone of voice, controlled and flexible, ranges from burlesque and clowning to bitter anger without losing its individual quality. His satire never becomes aimless comedy. When relating the sufferings of the persecuted, as for example when he touches on the plight of Waldegrave's wife and children, Martin states their case simply and appeals to the reader's indignation. In the following passage he is provoked by a bishop's praise of the Church of England:

Is it any marvel that we have so many swine, dumb dogs, non-residents, with their journeymen the hedge-priests; so many lewd livers, as thieves, murderers, adulterers, drunkards,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.46-47.



cormorants, rascals; so many ignorant and atheistical dolts, so many covetous Popish bishops, in our ministry; and so many and so monstrous corruptions in our Church? And yet likely to have no redress, seeing our impudent, shameless, and wainscot-faced Bishops, like beasts, contrary to the knowledge of all men, and against their own consciences, dare in the ears of her Majesty affirm all to be well, where there is nothing but sores and blisters; yea, where the grief is even deadly at the heart. <sup>1</sup>

There is something of the puritan earnestness so evident in the work of the godly ministers in this outburst.

Martin raises standard puritan and Presbyterian issues in his pamphlet, the most important of which is his argument that there should be an equality of ministers, and that no bishop should have any authority over his fellow ministers. Connected with this is the stress Martin lays on preaching which should be the first concern of every minister, and which the bishops are notably unable to practise often enough. But if Martin's message is the same as that of earlier Presbyterian tracts, his way of conveying it is not, and is worth detailed examination. One of his first points is a proof that the bishops ought not to be maintained by the magistrate in a Christian commonwealth, which is contained in a series of syllogisms.

The first of these syllogisms is prefaced by an aside to the reader: "Martin is a shrewd fellow, and reasoneth thus". The middle term contentiously asserts the bishops to be petty popes and petty antichrists, and just as the conclusion is started, another interjection

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.71.

this time from a bystander, encourages Martion: "Now, I pray thee, good Martin, speak out, if ever thou didst speak out, that her Majesty and the Council may hear thee." In the margin Martin himself comments on the interruption; "What malapert knaves are these that cannot be content to stand by and hear, but they must teach a gentleman how to speak!" He invites Bridges to come to his masters' rescue with; "What say you now, Brother Bridges?" Upon the bishops denying his minor term, that they are petty popes and petty antichrists, Martin produces another syllogism arguing that those who usurp authority over their fellow pastors cannot avoid this accusation. This is his conclusion:

Therefore, our Lord Bishops,—"What sayest thou, man?"—our Lord Bishops, I say, as John of Canterbury, Thomas of Winchester, (I will spare John of London for this time; for, it may be, he is at bowls, and it is pity to trouble my good brother, lest he should swear too bad), my reverend prelate of Lichfield, with the rest of that swinish rabble, are petty antichrists, petty pipes, proud prelates, intolerable with-standers of Reformation, enemies of the Gospel, and most covetous wretched priests.

In return for a comment in the margin that he puts more into the conclusion of his syllogism than the question asked Martin rounds on his 'bystanders' with mock exasperation:

This is a pretty matter, that standers-by must be so busy in other men's games. Why sauceboxes, must you be prattling? You are as mannerly as bishops, in meddling with that you have nothing to do; as they do in taking upon them civil offices. I think for any manners either they or you have, that you were brought up in Bridewell. But it is well that since you last interrupted me (for now this is the second time) you seem to have learnt your Cate De Moribus, in that you keep yourselves on the margent. Would you be

answered? Then you must know that I have set down nothing but the truth in the conclusion; and the syllogisms are mine own, I may do what I will with them, and thus hold you content. 1

The argument continues in this manner, dramatised to resemble a small debate, holding the readers interest by the freshness of Martin's comic verve. By thus enlivening his argument, making it more of an opportunity for insulting the bishops rather than a solemn pursuit of truth, Martin is aiming at a different, more extensive audience than his fellow Presbyterians, taking their development of controversy to its logical conclusion. As an early attempt to enlist the laughers on the side of right, Martin looks forward to the satirists of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

Indeed Martin's ability to keep up a continuous stream of wit as he doubles from one subject to another reminds one of the writings of the Elizabethan wits rather than the ecclesiastical controversialists, and foreshadows the development of Nashe's prose, which may owe something to the work of Martin. The love of punning, the sophisticated asides, the sensitivity to style and the controlled, sparkling prose indicate the aristocratic tradition of Elizabethan literature rather than the humble plainness of the puritan. The individuality of Martin's tone of voice, the quality that holds the reader, can hardly be shown in a few quotations, but the following reference to Mistress Lawson, an early example of the London women's

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<sup>1</sup> This and the previous quotations are all from Pierce, p.23-25.

enthusiasm for puritanism, shows him at his most typical:

Riddle me a riddle! What is that? His Grace threatened to send Mistress Lawson to Bridewell, because she showed the good father, Doctor Parne, a way how to get his name out of the 'Book of Martyrs,' where the turncoat is canonised for burning Bucer's bones. Dame Lawson answered that she was an honest citizen's wife, a man well known; and, therefore, bade his Grace, an he would, send his uncle Shory thither. Ha, ha, ha! Now, good your Grace, you shall have small gains in meddling with Margaret Lawson, I can tell you. For is she be cited before Tarquinius Superbus, Doctor Stanhope, she will desire him to deal as favourably with her in that cause, as he would with Mistress Blackwell. Tse-tse-tse! Will it never be better with you, Mistress Lawson? 1

The compression of Martin's insinuations, and the light emphasis he puts on them in this passage enables the reader to enjoy them without being encouraged to consider their truth. He makes the most of the engaging confrontation without labouring it.

Several of the anti-Martinist writers suggested that the stage and the professional fool provided the inspiration of Martin's comic patter. Nashe compared Martin with a fool,<sup>2</sup> as did Gabriel Harvey, who included Martin's opponents in the same category; "...Church

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.31-32, Perne, whose name often crops up in the tracts, was a friend and patron of Whitgift, who changed his profession for the reigns of both Mary and Elizabeth; He had been concerned both in the insults to the bodies of Bucer and Fagius, and their subsequent rehabilitation.

<sup>2</sup> An Almond for a Parrat (1590), The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. R.B. McKerrow, reprinted with corrections and notes by F.P. Wilson (5 vols; Oxford, 1958) IV, 354.

-matters cannot be discussed without rancke scurrillity, and as it were a Synode of Diapason fooles."<sup>1</sup> Martin himself admitted playing the fool, a part that did not exclude a serious purpose. The fool in real life often made pointed political and social criticism from his privileged position; Archie Armstrong, James I's fool, when shown a lean horse that refused to fatten, advised his master to make it a bishop.<sup>2</sup> The author of Mar-Martine mentioned Richard Tarleton, comic actor who had lately died, in connection with Martin:

These tinkers termes, and barbers iestes first Tarleton on the stage,  
Then Martin in his book of lies, hath put in euery page. 3

The Vice, a character often played by Tarleton, was also put forward as Martin's model; George Cramner accused him of imitating the Vice in order to make his work popular.<sup>4</sup> George Hibbard supports this suggestion:

The Vice ... is characterised by his rapid changes of front, his love of mischief, the impudence he shows to his superiors, his fondness for equivocation, verbal ambiguity and double entendre, and, above all, by the way in which he

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce's Superogation (1593), p.74-75. Reprinted in An Introductory Sketch, p.143.

<sup>2</sup> Enid Welsford, The Fool, His Literary and Social History. (London, 1935) p.172.

<sup>3</sup> The Complete Works of John Lyly, ed. R. Warwick Bond, (Oxford, 1902; reprinted, 1967) 3 vols. III, 426.

<sup>4</sup> This comes from a letter from George Cramner to Richard Hooker, reprinted in the latter's Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, (Everyman, London 1907) Book 5, Appendix II, 545.

is constantly drawing the attention of the audience to his shifts and manoeuvres and to the skill with which he manages them. 1.

The references to the stage and the fool recognise Martin's dramatic qualities, his humour, and his continuity with a longstanding tradition of popular satire. However they are necessarily vague, and though they show that Martin had introduced a new manner of writing into controversy on the Church, they throw no detailed light on his technique.

Towards the end of The Epistle Martin offers the bishops conditions of peace, a programme of general reform. The preaching ministry must be encouraged; candidates for the ministry must be both godly and learned, and none admitted without a cure to administer; Cartwright's confutation of the Roman Catholic Rhenish Testament must be published; the campaign of subscription and deprivation must cease; excommunication must not be invoked for trifling offences; and none must be harrassed or persecuted from their part in producing The Epistle itself. Martin humorously congratulates himself on his moderation in not demanding the discipline:

The conditions, you see, are so reasonable I might bind you to give over your places, which are antichristian. But I do not, lest men should think me to quarrel, and seek occasions for the nonce to fall out with my Brethren. Therefore, I require no more but such things as all the world will think you unworthy to live, if you grant them not. 2

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<sup>1</sup> G.R. Hibbard, Thomas Nashe, A Critical Introduction, (London, 1962) p.23.

<sup>2</sup> Pierce, p.81.

If these conditions are broken he will publish more of the bishops' sins, and promises to have a Martin in every parish to report to him. One of a list of fictitious works that he threatens to publish is reminiscent of Field's surveys of the Ministry:

Mine Itinerarium shall be a book of no great profit, either to the Church or Commonwealth; and yet had need to be in folio, or else judge you by this that followeth. I mean to make a survey into all the diocese in this land, that I may keep a visitation among my clergymen. I would wish them to keep good rule, and to amend their manners against I come. For I shall paint them in their colours, if I find anything amiss. 1

The pamphlet ends with a serious address to the bishops, summing up their defects with formal and measured gravity, and calling on them to reform and to repent.

(ii) The Epitome

At the start of The Epitome Martin crows with delight at the activity he has occasioned among the bishops, four of whom had already met to consider a reply:

Why, my clergy-masters, is it even so with your Terribleness? May not a poor gentleman signify his good will unto you by a Letter, but, presently, you must put yourselves to the pains and charges, of calling four bishops together; John Canterbury, John London, Thomas Winchester, William of Lincoln; and posting over city and country for poor Martin? Why, his meaning in writing unto you was not that you should take the pains to seek for him. 2

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.83.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.117.

Already Martin had a real life drama on his hands to supplement his subject matter and arouse the interest of possible readers. He boasts of his popularity with "all estates", including the court; "Every man talks of my Worship."<sup>1</sup> He acknowledges that some puritans have objected to the jesting and to the directness of The Epistle, but is undeterred by their censure. Martin threatens the bishops with his success in attaining notoriety (which he did not exaggerate) and refers to the prophecy that 1588 would be a year of miracles: "And, Bishops, I would I could make this year 1588 to be the wonderful year, by removing you all out of England."<sup>2</sup>

Martin starts his epitome of Bridges by describing the contrast between A Defence of the Government Established, "A very portable book if your horse be not too weak",<sup>3</sup> and A Learned Discourse; and by burlesquing the Dean's account of how he came to write against the puritans. In the margin he comments with mock admiration, "Ah, Brother Dean, that you are such a doer,"<sup>4</sup> when Bridges claims to have shaken the beliefs of many puritans by his eloquence. In The Epistle Martin had already taken a lively interest in the defects of Bridges's style and grammar, quoting some of his most tortuous and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.118.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.119-120

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.122.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.123.



overloaded sentences. He had taken particular care to ridicule the length of Bridges's sentences: "And, learned Brother Bridges, a man might almost run himself out of breath, before he could come to a full point in many places in your book."<sup>1</sup> Martin had not missed some surprising errors:

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|--|---|
| Sosthenes<br>and not<br>Crispus<br>was one<br>of the<br>Seventy-<br>two<br>disciples | There be periods in this learned book of great reason, though altogether without sense. I will give you a proof or two. Page 441: <u>And Although, saith the Doctor, Paul afterward, 1 Cor. 1,14, mentioning this Crispus, term him not there, the archgovenor of the Jews' Synagogue, yet as it farther appeareth, Acts 18, 17, by Sosthenes, who was long before a faithful Christian, and as some allege out of Eusebius, lib.1. cap.13. he was also one of the seventy two Disciples chosen by Christ.</u><br>'Fleering, jeering, leering,' - there is at all no sense in this period. From the words 'yet', 'afterward', unto the end, Master Doctor's mind was so set upon a bishopric that he brought nothing concerning Crispus to answer the word 'yet'. 2 |
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In The Epitome Martim extends such observations to build up the portrait of Bridges as an involuntary buffoon, who betrays the cause he is trying to defend:

His style is as smooth as a crabtree cudgel. The reader cannot choose but have as great delight therein as a jackanapes hath in a whip. He hath so thumped the cause with cross blows, that the Puritans are like to have a good and a sound cause of it as long as they live. In this one thing I dare prefer him before any that ever wrote; to wit, that there be not three whole periods for every page in the book, that is not graced with a very fair and visible solecism. Oh, most excellent and surpassing eloquence! He speaketh everything

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.36

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.34-35.

so fitly to the purpose, that he never toucheth the matter in question. A rare gift in a learned writer. He hath used such variety of learning that very often he hath translated out of one man's writing six or seven pages together, (note here a newfound manner of bookmaking). And, which is more strange, he bringeth those testimonies for his purpose, whose very words, translated and set down by him, are as flat against the purpose whereto he bringeth them, as fire quality is contrary to water. Had he a right use of his wits, think you, while they were thus bestowed? 1

Martin was clearly fascinated by the techniques of controversy as well as its subject matter, and realised that Bridges was more vulnerable to ridicule than to a totally serious refutation. In the body of The Epitome he tackles the same part of Bridges's book as Travers had done, the essential pages refuting the scriptural proof of the discipline in A Learned Discourse. Compared with Travers, Martin shows a solid grounding in the standard Presbyterian arguments and a thorough knowledge of the issues raised by Bridges in reply, but he employs his learning in a quite different manner from the puritan scholar. Making use of his familiarity with logic, particularly the syllogism, doubtless the result of the rhetorical training of the University, Martin ridicules the arguments of his opponent rather than answering them fairly. As he later remarks in praise of his learning, "I have been a great schoolman in my days"<sup>2</sup> It is not necessary to have read Bridges to appreciate Martin's satire, for he summarises the Dean's arguments, dramatising his own

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.123-4

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.159.

replies and accompanying them with his usual banter. In fact a comparison with A Defence of the Government Established shows that in spite of its involved sentences and laboured arguments it is more sensible than Martin would have his readers believe.

The process by which Bridges's arguments are distorted is very ingenious; they are never falsified, but their phrasing is altered and their context changed to make them easy targets for derision. Frequently two unconnected assertions are joined to make them appear as parts of a proof, or pages of complex argument, strewn with qualifying clauses, are summed up in a single syllogism. Martin indulges in prolonged play with Bridges's arguments in a highly sophisticated manner, creating an appearance of logical progression and effortless refutation of a clumsy and hamfisted opponent. With this display of logic runs a steady bantering of Bridges for his defects as a controversialist. Martin's command of the situation reduces the Dean to a caricature figure, bringing forward only "inforcible proofs" and "vincible reasons." Some light is cast on Martin's method by a comment at the end of this tract; "And let the learned reader judge whether other men cannot play the ignorant sots as well as you, Brother Bridges."<sup>1</sup> The ostentatious display of verbal and logical gymnastics is one of Martin's ways of playing the fool, pretending to rival his opponent in amazing

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.171

the reader; "Tush, tush! I would not have you claim all the skill in barbarisms and solecisms unto yourself. Other men can behave themselves with commendations that way as well as you; though, indeed, not so naturally, I grant."<sup>1</sup>

Martin's handling of Bridges is creative, intended to supplement his comic portrayal of the bishops and their supporters, and reminds one of Swift, who had also had a training in rhetoric and who could use the techniques of logic to burlesque an opponent's reasoning. It is significant that Travers's answer to the identical points is lucid and comprehensible while the detail of Martin's logic is often difficult to follow and more involved than is strictly necessary; one might even make an analogy with Touchstone's baffling of William in As You Like It, where scraps of the scholastic discipline are used to confuse the rustic for the amusement of the more knowing. Yet Martin does not lose himself in admiration of his own cleverness, as the literary wits sometimes do, and if he represents Bridges's work as incomprehensible he takes care that the object of his own tract remains clear; the Presbyterian system emerges from the welter of reasoning, and is forcefully impressed upon the reader. Martin even prefaces his examination with a brief but straightforward statement of the case disputed between bishops and puritans.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.171

It is difficult to give examples of the precise way in which Martin's summaries slant the arguments of Bridges towards absurdity, chiefly because of the complexity of the theological issues involved, and the unfamiliarity of scholastic learning to the present day. I shall, however, analyse one of the simplest examples of Martin's methods to illustrate what I have described. Bridges had opened his attack on A Learned Discourse with the remark that if the discipline were so necessary, it would be strange if the Church throughout its existence had not possessed it, or laboured to introduce it. All Travers did to counter this point was to state that it was a gibe rather than a serious reason, and to mention the continental Presbyterian Churches.

Martin summarises Bridges's point accurately, but treats it as a formal proof that the discipline is not necessary, as the proposition of a syllogism.<sup>1</sup> He invites Bridges to round off the syllogism and complete his argument formally. The Dean replies:

'Nay, soft there,' quoth Mass Dean, 'I trow the Puritans will not drive me to make syllogisms in this book. That is no part of mine intent; for if I had thought they would drive me to such pinches, I would not have meddled with them. Nay, by their leave, if the assumption or proposition be either more than I can prove, or be against

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<sup>1</sup> I assume that the completed syllogism would read:

- 1) If the discipline were necessary, the Church would either have possessed it, or have laboured for it.
- 2) But the Church did not possess it or labour for it.
- 3) Therefore it is not necessary.

myself, I will omit them. Pardon me, I pray you, my Masters, I will set down nothing against myself. I have brought in a true proposition, and that is enough for one man, I think. 1

Martin now advances the puritans' answer to Bridges's proposition;

Your answer, I know, may be of three sorts. First, you may say that the reason is Popish. Secondly, you may demand whether it be midsummer noon with him<sup>2</sup> or no; because he bringeth in a connex proposition, and assumeth nothing. Can you blame him in so doing? For the assumption must be either affirmative or negative. Now, if he had assumed affirmatively, he had overthrown himself; if negatively, then you, Brethren, would have denied the assumption, which Master Dean would never have been able to prove. So a man might put himself to a peck of troubles, indeed; and this is a point for your learning, closely to pass by that wherewith a man shall have no honesty to deal.

Thirdly, you may grant the proposition to be very true (to what end then did Sarum bring it in?); because Geneva and other Helvetian Churches have this government; and you labour for it. 3

Martin constructs and examines this syllogism far more elaborately than is necessary to understand or to answer Bridges, making it appear that whichever way the Dean's reasons are concluded they rebound to the puritans' advantage; Bridges seems a fool who introduces the arguments that disprove his own case. Stripped of Martin's prose the technique seems redundant, but he exploits it cleverly to pretend to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.128-129

<sup>2</sup> Connex, meaning conditional, is used to describe mutually dependent terms in logic. Bridges's proposition has two dependent parts. The ed. of 1588 has 'Moone'

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.129. Bridges would, of course, have assumed negatively, as in 2) above.

a confident superiority over his antagonist.<sup>1</sup>

Martin is always prepared for an opportunist stroke against the bishops, and draws attention to his digressions. In The Epistle he mentioned briefly An Harborowe of Faithful Subjects, a pamphlet written in exile by John Aylmer against Knox's attack on women rulers. It included a violent diatribe against the Marian bishops for their love of riches, their persecuting, their lordly state and their liking for civil offices. As the pamphlet had been published in the very beginning of Elizabeth's reign Martin is able to pretend that it makes no distinction between Popish and protestant prelates, and indeed Aylmer appeared to envisage a complete reform of the episcopate. Martin is delighted to publicise Aylmer's former reforming zeal, so inconsistent with his present state as Bishop of London, and it gives colour for his contention that bishops only defend their corruptions for love of wealth and power.

In The Epitome Martin breaks off his exchanges with Bridges in order to give a judgement on An Harborowe, and paradoxically asserts:

I say although he hath therein spoken against bishops, even our bishops now living, and so against himself, as being now a bishop, yet that his book is a carnal and unlearned book, smelling altogether of earth, without rime, and without reason. And that his speaking

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<sup>1</sup> Martin is fond of working with syllogisms; in The Epistle he advises the bishops to use them instead of continued prose. This liking was shared by Fenner, Penry and Udall. Fenner also asked the bishops to answer by syllogistic reasoning out of the Bible. (A Defence of the Godlie Ministers, p.150). Martin often uses it to give a formal structure to his ridicule.



against bishops therein was but a snare to catch a  
 bishopric, as it now appeareth. 1

First Martin quotes some of Aylmer's choicest invective against the  
 bishops, which does not lack vigour:

Come off, you Bishops, away with your superfluities,  
 yield up your thousands, be content with your hundreds,  
 as they be in other Reformed Churches, where be as  
 great learned men as you are. Let your portion be priest-  
 like and not princelike. Let the Queen have the rest of  
 your temporalities and other lands to maintain the wars  
 which you have procured, and your Mistress left her, and  
 with the rest to build and found schools throughout the  
 realm; that every parish church may have its preacher,  
 every city its superintendent, to live honestly, and not  
 pompously; which will never be, unless lands be dispersed  
 and bestowed upon many, which now feedeth and fatteth but  
 one. 2

Martin even finds an unusually apposite reference to the Marian  
 bishop of London, whose place Aylmer has taken:

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|          | ...the next he may be thought to have written to<br>himself, which he hath set down, page 34, 'As if |
| Doth he  | you should say, my lord Lubber of London is a tyrant.  |
| mean     | Ergo he is no bishop. I warrent you although he  |
| Watson   | granted you the antecedent, which he can hardly deny,  |
| the pur- | yet he would deny the consequent, or else he would call  |
| suiuant, | for wily Watson to help him.'  |
| trow     | Here, Brother London, you have crossed yourself over   |
| you?     | the costard, once in your days. 3  |

It was a lucky coincidence that Aylmer had a pursuivant called Watson;  
 the quotation refers to the Marian bishop of Lincoln.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce, p.147

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.149.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.150.



Martin takes exception to the book not for its opinions, but on grounds of literary style; he objects to the violence of Aylmer's invective, which proves him to be "a lump of mere flesh."<sup>1</sup> It is a sign of Martin's unusual interest in style that he accuses Aylmer of an "indiscreet brutishness" very different from his own witty railing:

In the last place; against the French King he railleth and outrageth in this wise-

'That Turkish Valesius, that French tyrant: Is he a king or a devil? a Christian or a Lucifer? that by his cursed confederacy with the Turk,' Page 113, line 4, 'O wicked caitiff and firebrand of hell.' And line 8,

'O foolish Germans, which conspire not, together with the rest of Christian princes, to pull out such a traitor to God and His kingdom by the ears out of France and hang him against the sun a-drying.'

The discreet reader of that which hath been spoken may apparently see the indiscreet brutishness that was in you even then, when you were best worthy to be accounted of; and thereby may gather what you are now when you have bidden farewell not only unto the sincerity of religion, which then you seemed to embrace, but even to all humanity and civil behaviour. 2

This is an early practical use in controversy of the maxim, "style makes the man", to discredit an opponent, a favourite technique of pamphleteers with an interest in literature, particularly in the early eighteenth century.

Before the next major tract of Martin's there appeared a broad-sheet known as The Mineralls, printed in February 1589 to feed public interest while Hay any Worke for Cooper was being produced. Its full

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.153 'Mere', 1588 ed had 'earthly'

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.153.

title was Certain Mineral and Metaphysical Schoolpoints to be defended by the Reverend Bishops and the rest of my Clergy masters of the Convocation House. The form chosen was another partly humorous application of the conventions of the schools, and is aptly described by Pierce:

The School-point was the theme which the University scholar exhibited and was prepared to defend, according to the methods of formal logic, against all comers. Martin selects a number of extracts from the speeches of the bishops and their supporters and constitutes the school-points. Many of these points were serious matters to the minds of the Evangelical reformers; some represent clerical scandals; some reveal Martin's own ingenuity chiefly; and others give publicity to grotesque views uttered by the Church defenders. 1

Most of the points raised are dealt with either in preceding or subsequent tracts of Martin. The broadsheet ends with a mocking imitation of the Bishops inviting a reader to dispute the points set down; "Let him set up his name and we will send a pursuivant for him. Whosoever he be, the matters shall be according unto order quietly tried out between him and the bare walls in the Gatehouse or some other prison."<sup>2</sup>

(iii) Hay any Worke for Cooper

In January 1589 the defenders of episcopacy had published their first reply, Bishop Thomas Cooper of Winchester's An Admonition to the People of England. Even allowing for Cooper's gloomy exaggeration

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.177

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.196

his opening sentence is a remarkable testimony to the unpopularity of the Elizabethan bishops;

WHen I call to my remembrance, the loathsome contempt, hatred, and disdaine, that the most part of men in these dayes beare, and in the face of the worlde declare towarde the Ministers of the Church of God, aswell Bishops as other among vs here in Englande: my heart can not but greatly feare and tremble at the consideration thereof. 1.

Cooper's work is a general defence of the bishops, mostly devoted to their right to possess lands and riches, and their function in church and state, rather than the question of the Presbyterian discipline; his style is heavy and verbose. Cooper depended much on equating the puritans with the revolutionary anabaptist sects of the continent, and charged them with trying to overturn the civil state and bring in a democracy or even, "An Anabaptisticall equalitie and communitie".<sup>2</sup> He represented the episcopate as part of the essential constitution of the realm, the prime support of the monarchy. The puritans were for him social revolutionaries, and if they prospered the nobility

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<sup>1</sup> An Admonition, ed. Edward Arber (Birmingham, 1882), p.9.

<sup>2</sup> An Admonition, ed. Edward Arber (London, 1895), p.31.

and finally the crown would suffer destruction.<sup>1</sup>

R.B. Mckerrow has shown by typographical evidence that the section of Cooper's work that deals with Martin, about a sixth of the book, was inserted after the book had been partly printed.<sup>2</sup> Thus as Martin was to point out, much was irrelevant to his pamphlets. What was relevant was a result of consultation between the bishops, and was mainly devoted to answering Martin's specific allegations. There are some surprising admissions; Aylmer confessed that he had seized cloth which had been abandoned in his liberties and had refused to restore it, as was his legal right and that he still owed his grocer's estate ten pounds. Aylmer justified swearing by his faith on the grounds that it was equivalent to saying "Amen". Some charges, (most notably that the bishop of St. Davids had two wives<sup>3</sup>), are left untouched, others are denied only in part, so that the general effect

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<sup>1</sup> This was the assumption of nearly all the defenders of the bishops. It would appear on first sight to be very unfair. The Presbyterians still considered themselves part of the Church, and vehemently protested their complete obedience to the prince, even when executed. They never organised violent revolution and indeed were too closely tied to the nobility and gentry, on whom they were dependent for their very existence, to preach in favour of social change. On this they were conservative; Bancroft once jeered that though the puritans criticised the Church they were silent about the sins of the landlords. (Collinson, op.cit. p.188). Nevertheless the voice of the congregation in electing their minister had a democratic touch, and the encouragement of individual judgement as against authority that was inherent in protestantism, was later to result in revolution that would have horrified the Elizabethan puritans.

<sup>2</sup> The Works of Thomas Nashe, V, 43 (note).

<sup>3</sup> He was soon deprived by the High Commission, so this may well have been true.

is not unfavourable to Martin. Cooper only once attempted to answer Martin in his own kind, with an elaborate description of The Judgement of Apelles from Lucian, into which Martin is inserted as the Calumniator who accuses Innocence.

Martin's reply, published from the new home of the press near Coventry in March 1589, combines serious exposition of the discipline with the ribald contempt for the bishop, "Father Thomas Tub Trimmer of Winchester."<sup>1</sup> The title uses a London street cry to play on his name:

Hay any Worke for Cooper: Or a briefe Pistle directed by Waye of an hublication to the reverende Byshopps/ counselling them/ if they will needs be barrellled up/ for feare of smelling in the nostrrels of her Masjestie and the State/ that they would use the advise of reverend Martin/ for the providing of their Cooper. Wherin worthy Martin quits himselfe like a man I warrant you/ in the modest defence of his selfe and his learned Pistles/ and makes the Coopers hoopes to fly off/ and the Bishops Tubs to leak out of all crye. 2

Martin is delighted at the publicity that the licensed pamphlet of Cooper has given him, and takes full advantage of his opponent's damaging admissions.

Now, truly, Brethren, I find you kind. Why, ye do not know what a pleasure you have done me. My Worship's books were unknown to many before you allowed T.C. to admonish the people of England to take heed that, if they loved you, they would make much of their prelates, and the chief of the clergy. Now, many seek after my books, more than ever

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce, p.214

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.212.

they did. Again, some knew not that our Brother, John of Fulham, was so good unto the porter of his gate, as to make the poor, blind, honest soul to be a dumb minister. Many did not know, either, that 'Amen' is as much as 'By my faith!'; and, so, that our Saviour Christ ever sware by His faith. Or, that bowling and eating on the Sabbath are of the same nature ... Many, I say, were ignorant of these things, and many other pretty toys, until you wrote this pretty book. 1

There are more scandalous stories, though fewer than in the two previous tracts. Martin makes jocular remarks on the notorious infidelity of Cooper's wife with Dr. Day, and on the Bishop of Chester's love of card-playing. On the latter subject he imitates the worldly tone in which Aylmer's bowls had been treated in An Admonition to the People of England: "For , in winter it is no matter to take a little sport; for an odd cast, braces of twenty nobles; when the weather is so foul that men cannot go abroad to bowls, or to shoot. What, would you have men to take no recreation?"<sup>2</sup>

Cooper had unfortunately made two alterations in his work by having a second version pasted over the cancelled passages. One of these was an inopportune admission that the early Church had a form of Presbyterian government; it was changed to, "this is not yet proved". Martin greets this with a series of puns: "Here you see that if this patch, T.C., had not used two patches to cover his

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.214.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.218.

patchery, the Bishops would have accounted him as very a patch as Dean John"<sup>1</sup> The description of Martin as the Calumniator is tossed casually back, with prominent Churchmen in the place of the allegorical character, as if in contempt of such a laboured method of insult:

Lucian of Westminster himself was the painter. Midas of Cant the judge. The one of the two women called 'Ignorance' was the Good Wife of Bath. 'Doctor Culpable', Warden of New College. The other called 'Jealous Suspicion' was the fox, John of Exeter. Then came Wynken de Worde, alias Dr. Prim<sup>e</sup>, calumniator. This Wynken and his Lordship of Winchester, drew 'Innocency,' to wit, Martin Marprelate, gentleman, by the hair of his head. Then followed Dolus, Fraus, Insidiae: to wit, Doctor Perne, Doctor Kenold, and Doctor Cosins. The treader was Cankered Malice. His eyes were fiery, his face thin and withered, pined away with melancholy; and this was Doctor Copcot. Then followed Doleful Repentance, that is, Dean John repenting that ever he had written in the bishops' behalf; because his Grace is not as good as his word. T.C., consider this picture until we meet again." 2

The dramatising of argument is continued in the early part of Hay any Worke for Cooper; encouragement to Martin is interjected, such as: "Ha! old Martin; yet I see thou hast it in thee, thou wilt enter into the bowels of the cause in hand, I perceive."<sup>3</sup> Martin searches for new ways to express his amusement: "Py, hy, hy, by! I cannot but laugh, Py, hy, hy, by!"<sup>4</sup> He makes a pretence of talking

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.218.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.282-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.216.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.217.

to his reader. At an important point he appeals for assistance, treating the argument as a street brawl: "And, hold my cloak, there, somebody, that I may go roundly to work. For I'se so bumfeg the Cooper, as he had been better to have hooped half the Tubs in Winchester, then write against my Worship's 'pistles.'"<sup>1</sup> The rustic dialect is another of Martin's comic affectations.

Most of this tract is taken up with a straightforward justification of the discipline and a detailed examination of the views Cooper has attributed to the puritans. Martin accuses Cooper of falsifying the Presbyterian attitude in order to refute it: "You bestow not full fifty pages in the answer of any thing that ever was published in print. The rest are bestowed to maintain the belly and to confute - what, think you? Even the slanderous inventions of your own brains, for the most part."<sup>2</sup> He denies that the puritans wish all ministers to live in poverty in order to resemble Christ and the Apostles; they realise that the Church must have adequate maintenance, but think it wrong for one minister to have revenues that might maintain ten. Puritans are not the same as separatists or Brownists, and neither are they democrats in the organisation of either Church or state. Martin follows the usual Presbyterian line on the royal supremacy. The magistrate has a right to govern the Church in the sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.230.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.219.



supervising its officials, but not to decide what form Church government should take, as this is laid down in the scriptures. Indeed the magistrate has a duty to establish the godly discipline. Martin blames the bishops rather than the Queen as they have given her false advice. He protests his absolute loyalty to Elizabeth, who holds her authority directly from God, denying that opposition to the bishops has any connection with civil disobedience. He writes out of patriotism, to warn the Queen of the sins that the bishops are leading her into, and pretends confidence that she may at any time be convinced of the truth.

This was high-handed language to use to a Tudor monarch, and Martin attempted to strengthen himself by arguing that the bishops were greater traitors and a greater danger to the state than any puritan. They are likely to prove, "Mar-prince, Mar-state, Mar-law, Mar-magistrate, Mar-commonwealth."<sup>1</sup> By encouraging the deformity of the Church, the defenders of episcopacy provoke God's vengeance against England. A more mundane reason is that the bishops themselves insinuate that they hold office by divine right, while they openly

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.237. Cooper had asserted that Martin would prove to be the first four of these characters. (An Admonition, p.31).

subscribe to the view that they depend entirely on the Queen's authority.<sup>1</sup> The bishops infringe the royal authority by their arbitrary courts, particularly the High Commission, where the 'ex officio' oath flouts English law. Martin angles for anticlerical support by exposing Cooper's hint that the Queen had no right to grant ecclesiastical lands to laymen, holding out the bishops' wealth as a temptation to abolish them.<sup>2</sup> With brave defiance Martin threatens the bishops with his oft mentioned favour at court.

It is in this tract that Martin makes the fullest statement of his reasons for writing as he did. The tracts increasingly refer to the dislike of the puritan preachers for Martin's methods, for his

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<sup>1</sup> At this stage the Elizabethan bishops stood on the ground that they existed by authority of the Queen, and claimed no divine or even apostolic precepts. However there were those who tended in the latter direction; Martin quotes several remarks of Bridges's that might be interpreted in this light, and Bancroft's sermon at Paul's Cross in February 1589 attacking the puritans hinted strongly at apostolic and even divine authority for the episcopate, and led to a rebuke from the Queen's ministers.

<sup>2</sup> This was highly unscrupulous of Martin, though a common tactic of reformers, as a major problem of the Church was the tendency of Elizabeth to pillage it for her advantage, and Cooper's brave word of reproof was well warranted. Martin himself disclaimed advocating pillage of the Church in The Protestation, and while doubtless he was sincere he was not above adding the temptation of the Church's riches to his persuasion.

jesting and outspokenness.<sup>1</sup> He treated this disapproval confidently in *The Epitome*, but in the tract following Hay any Worke for Cooper,

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<sup>1</sup> The puritan divines were very consistent in their dislike of Martin, who threatened their limited toleration by the state, and, they considered, brought their cause into disrepute by his scurrility. Waldegrave quitted the post of printer to Marprelate after the publication of Hay any Worke at least partly because all the preachers he had consulted disliked the tracts. (Introductory Sketch, p.99). The following passage is quoted from Collinson (op.cit. p.393): "Cartwright was able to assure Burghley that 'from the first beginning of Martin unto this day, I have continually upon any occasion testified both my mislike and sorrow for such kind of disordered proceeding.' Josias Nichols deplored this 'foolish jester' from whom the preachers had earned the new name of 'Martinists'; 'how justly God knoweth.' 'Then did our troubles increase, and the pursuit was hardly followed against us.' And Thomas Brightman was to give his opinion in an influential commentary on the Apocalypse that if 'the angel of the Church of England' had been in any estimation, men 'would have rather cast those writings into the fire, than have worn them out with continual reading and handling them.'" Perhaps more surprising were the reservations Udall and even Penry had about the tracts. When questioned Udall denied having written the tracts, but refused to speak at all on Diotrephes or A Demonstration of Discipline; he agreed that the matter of all these pamphlets was the same, but did not wish to have Martin's methods ascribed to him. (Introductory Sketch, p.171). At his trial in 1590 he stated that he did not believe that any minister had written Martin's tracts, which had not been approved by the "godly learned" (Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials. I (London, 1809) 1273-1294, referred to in The Notebook of John Penry, 1593, ed. Albert Peel, London, 1944, p.xvii). Penry objected to Martin's manner in the drafts of a letter to Burghley in which he denied he was the author of the Marprelate Tracts: "I disliked manie thinges in Mart. both for his maner and matter of wryting. Unseemely iestes, uncomly rayling I allow not, and iudge them more beseeeming the Prel. and theyr Parrasites than anie modest Christian." (The Notebook of John Penry, p.71). Coming from one so closely connected with the Marprelate affair this is puzzling testimony; had Penry's view of them changed since he acted as Martin's publisher? His testimony, however, does show how different was the technique of Martin from even the most extreme of the puritan ministers.

The general puritan objection to humour was that it made sin ridiculous instead of odious; this was advanced by Richard Greenham in connection with Martin. (Marshall Moon Knappen, Tudor Puritanism, Chicago, 1939, p.259).

usually called Martin Junior, he was to acknowledge that some liked him for the wrong reasons, presumably for sheer dislike of any clergy whatsoever. In Hay any Worke he answers his critics at length:

I am not disposed to jest in this serious matter. I am called Martin Marprelate. There be many that greatly dislike my doings. I have my wants I know; for I am a man. But my course I know to be ordinary and lawful. I saw the cause of Christ's government, and of the Bishops' antichristian dealing to be hidden. The most part of men could not be gotten to read anything written in the defence of the one, and against the other. I bethought me, therefore, of a way whereby men might be drawn to do both; perceiving the humours of men in these times (especially of those that are in any place) to be given to mirth. I took that course. I might lawfully do it. Aye for jesting is lawful by circumstances, even in the greatest matters. The circumstances of time, place, and persons urged me thereunto. I never profaned the Word in any jest. Other mirth I used as a covert, wherein I would bring the truth into light. The Lord being the author both of mirth and gravity, is it not lawful in itself, for the truth to use either of these ways, when the circumstances do make it lawful? <sup>1</sup>

Martin had the same purpose as the godly ministers, and beneath his jesting the same earnestness, but here he explicitly stated his intention to reach a wider audience than they had, and to whip up more pressure for reform. This passage is reminiscent of Udall's preface to A Demonstration of Discipline, but Martin took a step further in his search for readers by creating a literary personality to voice the attack on the bishops with irresistible satiric humour. Reforming pamphlets of the sixteenth century had often contained ironic and humorous touches, as we have seen in the work of Field, Fenner, Udall

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce, p.238-239.

and Penry. A few writers had given satire a larger place in their works, William Turner against the Catholics, and Anthony Gilby on the abuses of the Elizabethan Church.<sup>1</sup> However these had been isolated efforts, and that of Gilby, nearest in time to Martin, was in a quieter key and lacked Marprelate's explosive quality. In his readiness to use ridicule as a weapon Martin stood out from the body of puritan ministers.

The question of who exactly were Martin's readers is intriguing but difficult to answer satisfactorily. Actual evidence concerning the distribution of the tracts gives little help. Giles Wiggington, fellow minister and friend of Penry and Udall, was found distributing some copies, as was a bailiff in Kingston.<sup>2</sup> Humphrey Newman, who carried loads of the tracts from the press to London, was a cobbler by trade; Sharpe, the bookseller who bound some of the tracts also disposed of a number. Rumour had it that Essex had shown a 'Martin'

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<sup>1</sup> William Turner, The Hunting and finding out of the Romish Fox. (1543). Anthony Gilby, A Pleasante Dialogue between a Souldier of Berrwicke and an English Chaplaine. (published 1581, though written seven years earlier). Marshall Moon Knappen relates Turner's work in particular to that of Marprelate, (Tudor Puritanism, p.69-70) and says of Gilby's; "Though generally neglected by students of literature, this satire, remarkable for humor and spirit, belongs with the works of Turner, Bale, and Martin Marprelate in the first rank of controversial productions." (Ibid, p.200). Turner is mentioned in The Epistle for his love of practical jokes at the expense of the clergy's vestments. (Pierce, p.86).

<sup>2</sup> An Introductory Sketch, pp.84, and 81.

to Elizabeth at the Council.<sup>1</sup> The impression I gather from the pamphlets themselves is that Martin is principally concerned to seek new readers inside the gentry and nobility, those "in any place", those on whom the administration of England depended. I have mentioned the protection given by influential nobles and gentlemen to the preachers. Martin insists on his gentility, and refers often to his favour at court. The sophistication and play of wit would presumably have appealed most strongly to the educated classes. A relevant consideration is that the number of tracts published was small by later standards, perhaps nearly one thousand an edition;<sup>2</sup> even allowing for many people to read one copy this cannot have meant a mass readership. It is indeed surprising how much notoriety was achieved by such a small number of pamphlets, many of which must have come into the hands of people of some importance.

Much of the scandal and invective of the Marprelate tracts would have been quite comprehensible to those, inside and outside the gentry, who had not enjoyed the university education of the author. Martin claims in The Epitome that "all estates" favour him,<sup>3</sup> and Martin Senior appeals to the nobility, gentry, ministers and people to petition for

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce, A Historical Introduction, p.159-160.

<sup>2</sup> An Introductory Sketch, pp.99 and 102.

<sup>3</sup> Pierce, p.118.

reformation. The congregations formed the roots of the puritan movement; from early in the century there had been in England small groups of men low on the social scale, small tradesmen, minor town-folk who were eager for reform and prepared to back a reforming minister to the hilt. I cannot imagine Martin displeased that his works should circulate among what Christopher Hill calls "the industrious sort of people"<sup>1</sup> in the lower reaches of the puritan movement. The lack of knowledge of the extent of literacy in Elizabethan England hampers conjecture about how low in the social scale such tracts as those of Martin may have reached, but religion was a matter that in theory at least could concern everyone aware of his possible salvation or damnation.

Martin certainly found more and different readers than previous writers on the Presbyterian discipline. That there were dramatic satires about Martin must indicate that the tracts were reaching some of the socially varied audience of the Elizabethan stage.<sup>2</sup> The employment of the literary wits by Bancroft<sup>3</sup> also shows that different readers were being reached, though without more evidence of the reading habits of the Elizabethan public this proves nothing of their social composition. It was widely recognised at the time that Martin's work

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<sup>1</sup> Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England, (London, 1964) p.132. The phrase is taken from Slingsby Bethel's The World's Mistake in Oliver Cromwell (1668).

<sup>2</sup> See for information on this point, Alfred Harbage, Shakespeare's Audience. (New York, 1961).

<sup>3</sup> See p. 77 & 78.



represented an appeal to the people more thorough than that of any previous Presbyterian writer. The accusations of anti-Martinist writers that he aimed at inciting the common people to rebellion against their rulers need not be taken too seriously, as this was standard scaremongering practice. George Cramner's letter to Hooker, written in 1594, gives a more sober opinion:

1. That whereas T.C. and others his great masters had always before set out the discipline as a queen, and as the daughter of God, he contrariwise to make her more acceptable to the people, brought her forth as a vice upon the stage.
2. Which conceit of his was grounded (as may be supposed) upon this rare policy, that seeing the discipline was by writing refuted, in parliament rejected, in secret corners hunted out and descried, it was imagined that by open railing (which to the vulgar is commonly most plausible) the state ecclesiastical might have been drawn into such contempt and hatred, as the overthrow thereof should have been most grateful to all men, and in a manner desired of the common people. 1

Bacon ended his impartial and considered discussion of the Marprelate controversy with a protest against the publishing of such writers as Martin and his opponents: "Lastly, whatsoever he pretendeth, the people is no meet arbitrator; but rather the quiet modest and private assemblies and conferences of the learned."<sup>2</sup> The word "people" should perhaps not be too strictly related to social status in these quotations; what the writers refer to is the same as Field's "multitude and people."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hooker, op. cit. V, p.545

<sup>2</sup> An Advertisement touching the Controversies of the Church of England. Resuscitatio, (edition 1657 folio) pp.162-179, reprinted E. Arber, An Introductory Sketch, p.168

<sup>3</sup> See p.11 & 12.



They testify that Martin addressed himself to a new audience, consisting of anyone literate and committed enough to take an interest, the growing audience for political journalism.

(iv) Martin Junior and Martin Senior

The next two tracts were printed within a week of each other, late in July, at Wolston, in a house willingly lent by the wife of a puritan gentleman. They purpose to be the work of Martin's sons, and are probably not written by the same author as the previous Marprelate Tracts. It is difficult to distinguish whether the tantalising hints about the authorship and production of the tracts given in these and the final pamphlet are a literary framework or daringly factual; some unlikely pieces of information have proved to be sober truth by the subsequent examination of the printers.<sup>1</sup> The first pamphlet, Theses Martiniae,

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<sup>1</sup> I have deliberately refrained from relating in detail the narrative of the production of the tracts, or speculating on their authorship. These subjects are exhaustively discussed in the following works:

E.Arber, An Introductory Sketch.

William Pierce, A Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts, (London, 1908)

Donald McGinn, John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy, (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1966).

J. Dover Wilson, "Shakespeare's Fluellen", The Library, Third Series, III (1912) 113-151, 241-276.

The question of authorship remains undecided; Donald McGinn's attempt to prove Penry to be Martin is marred by his refusal to mention Penry's very explicit and circumstantial denials that he was Marprelate recorded in his notebook. Neither does he explain why Penry should there acknowledge authorship of his other tracts, equally violent against the bishops, though written without humour, and not those of Martin. I agree with Pierce that the style of Penry's known tracts is utterly different from Marprelate. For what it is worth, my own opinion is that Martin Junior's Epilogue and probably Martin Senior, are the work of different authors from the Martin of the first four tracts and the last. I also think that Martin was unlikely to have been one of the ministers, and that the choice lies between Job Throckmorton, or more probably an unknown whose name was not then connected with the tracts.

usually called Martin Junior consists of a list of theses, the definition of subjects stated categorically in formal logic. These are without the usual proofs or references, allegedly because they came from loose papers of "old Martin" found and published uncorrected by his son, Martin Junior; the theses are accompanied by a Preface from Martin himself, and an Epilogue written by his son.

In the Preface Martin admits that the manner of his writing has caused general apprehension:

I see my doings and my course misliked by many, both the good and the bad; though, also, I have favourers of both sorts. The Bishops and their train, though they stumble at the cause, yet especially mislike my manner of writing. Those whom foolishly men call Puritans, like of the matter I have handled, but the form they cannot brook. So that, herein, I have them both for my adversaries. 1

In an unusually sombre mood Martin seems ready to make his farewell to pamphleteering, but volunteers a final offer of the theses, written without his accustomed jesting, to restore him to the puritans' good opinion. He challenges the bishops to reply to them with syllogistic logic, confirmed by the scripture, rather than by their usual methods of slander and persecution. The points themselves prove the discipline and restate Martin's objections to the bishops yet again. Some theses reassert that the bishops are the real traitors to the state, particularly Bancroft, whose assertion, in his sermon at Paul's Cross on February 9, 1589, that Martin's logic could prove the Queen a petty pope and antichrist as well as the bishops, Martin bitterly resents. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce, p.304.

points have been dealt with in Hay any Worke, some may have been intended for the next tract, More Work for Cooper, which contained a refutation of Bancroft.<sup>1</sup> Martin also asserts that the Presbyterians are the direct descendants of the early reformers of England, Tyndale, Barnes and Firth, who are approved in Foxe's Book of Martyrs.

Martin Junior's Epilogue is a not too successful attempt to imitate the mode of the earlier tracts; Martin's devices are used mechanically, with an air of pastiche. One of the episcopal writers considered the humour of this tract and its fellow weaker than that of their predecessors:

The trimme man their Father yet, together with his  
ribauldry, had some wit (though knauish) and woulde make  
some foolish women, and pot companions to laugh, when  
sitting on their Alebenches ... But these two dull Asses...  
haue no wit in the world. Their iests bee so stinking  
stale; as you must holde your nose while you reade them,  
or els they will goe neare to turne your stomack. 2

By the summer of 1589 Bancroft's organisation of a new kind of reply had begun to bear fruit; Martin Junior indignantly mentions the stage players and a verse satire Mar-Martine. Such debased champions are worthy of the bishops, and will not dissuade Martin from his purpose.

The Just Censure and Reproof of Martin Junior purports to be a rebuke from Martin Senior, who blames his younger brother for exciting the bishops' wrath against his father. The highlight of this

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<sup>1</sup> The Protestation, Pierce, p.412

<sup>2</sup> Martins Months minde. Reprinted in The Complete Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. A.B. Grosart, (London, 1883-4). Vol.I, p.163-4.

tract is a very able parody of Whitgift making a speech to his pursuivants urging them to search out Martin and his secret press, and arrest him, his helpers, and even anyone found reading his tracts. Whitgift's tendency to lose his temper, to treat his inferiors like schoolchildren, and his acid form of speech were widely known; Martin Senior hits them off with spirit:

Now, sirs, is not her Majesty's High Commission and myself also, being the chief thereof, and one of her Majesty's Privy Council, well set up with a company of messengers, as long as we have you to go of our business? What think you? Have you been careful of us and our places, to find us out the press and letters wherewith these seditious 'Martins' are printed? Or have you diligently sought me out Waldgrave, the printer; Newman, the cobbler; Sharpe, the bookbinder of Northampton; and that seditious Welshman, Penry, who, you shall see, will prove the author of all these libels? 1

Mentioning the names of those actually involved may have been a gesture of defiance, or an attempt at double bluff, in keeping with the 'frankness' of the latter tracts.

Whitgift advises the pursuivants to watch the puritan preachers in London and in the country, and to hunt for 'Martins' in the bookshops, and among congregations of the London preachers. Whitgift grows more and more angry with the pursuivants as he details the extent of the puritan movement: "Well, I give you warning, look better unto your offices; or else let me be damned body and soul, if I turn you not all out of your places."<sup>2</sup> If those who visit Essex, Suffolk, and

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<sup>1</sup> Pierce, p.352

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.354

Norfolk can bring no Martinists from them, "I would ye might starve for me"<sup>1</sup> These encouragements culminate in the awesome threat: "And I think I shall go stark mad with you, unless you bring him."<sup>2</sup> He harps on the theme that Martin is opposed to the civil power:

I tell you true, I do not think him and his brood to be worse than the Jesuits. These Martinists are all of them traitors and enemies unto her Majesty; they will overthrow the State; they are most rebellious and disobedient unto all good proceedings. 3

Martin Senior adds in the margin; "Saving your reverence, uncle Cantur- you lie in your throat!"<sup>4</sup> Whitgift's last threat is to have Martin proclaimed a traitor to the Queen. The parody is remarkable for its lack of exaggeration as well as for its humour.

The remainder of the tract contains a mixture of argument, comedy and invective reminiscent of the early tracts, but the denunciation of Whitgift becomes far more like the solemn invective of the godly ministers than that of Martin, though he was capable of varying wit with earnestness. The gloomy tone of The Protestation shows that Martin could not always sustain a comic approach. Even so, I find it hard to believe that the critic of Aylmer's over-violent language wrote the following lines:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.357.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.359.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.359.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.359.

Nay, the message of death which the Lord sent lately, even into thine own house, ought to move thee, and face thee to confess that thy years also, yea, and days, are numbered. Doctor Perne, thou knowest, was thy joy, and thou his darling. He was the dragon from whose serpentine breasts thou didst first draw this poison, wherewith now thou infectest the Church of God, and feedest thyself unto damnation. He lived a persecutor, an atheist, an hypocrite and a dissembler, whom the world pointed at, and he died, thou knowest, the death due unto such a life as he led. 1

Martin Senior reproves the puritan gentry and people as well as the ministers for their backwardness, and asks them to petition for the thorough reform of the Church. He recommends Bridges as a fool for Whitgift, and attacks the use of "Bishop's English", the way the bishops distort the meaning of the words not only of their opponents, but even of their own Prayer Book. In the Bishops' English, "to seek the removing of unlawful callings out of the Church", becomes, "to threaten that the lawful magistrate should be thrust out of the Commonwealth."<sup>2</sup> This is a brave attempt to avoid the appearance of questioning the Queen's prerogative, and resist the accusations of disobedience to her. With a short parody of Aylmer addressing his pursuivants and an answering rhyme to the "brothel Beast",<sup>3</sup> Mar-Martin, the pamphlet ends.

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<sup>1</sup> p.367-8 This should be compared with the reference to the death of Perne in The Protestation: "Next to this, as I take it, followed a preamble to an Epitaph, upon the death of old Andrew Turncoat, to be sung antiphonically in his Grace's chapel, on Wednesdays and Fridays, to the lament of Orawhynemeg." (Pierce, p.412).

<sup>2</sup> Pierce, p.373.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.379.

(v) The Protestation

In August 1589, when the Marprelate Press was printing More Work for Cooper, it was discovered, and its printer Hoskins, who had taken over from Waldegrave after Hay any Worke for Cooper, seized and tortured. With the information concerning the printing of the tracts available to the authorities the situation of Penry and Job Throckmorton, the puritan gentleman who had assisted him in producing the last two tracts, was perilous in the extreme. They printed a last tract before Penry fled for Scotland, a last gesture of defiance. As it has never been discovered how this was printed we are reduced to guesswork, but it may well have been started by Penry, as the first pages have been set up by an inexperienced compositor, a pathetic sign of the straits that Marprelate's publishers were reduced to.

The Protestation of Martin Marprelate starts in a sombre manner with the subject of the seizure of the printers:

These events I confess do strike me and give me just cause to enter more narrowly into myself to see whether I be at peace with God, or no. But utterly to discourage me from mine enterprise, a greater matter than that comes to I hope shall never be able. The state of poor men that are taken I do bewail; not because they can hurt me, for I assure thee, they know not who I am, but inasmuch as, I fear, the tyranny of our wicked priests will do that against them, which neither the Word of God doth warrant, nor law of the land doth permit. 1

The possibility of torture, which Martin correctly guessed would be applied, casts an air of gloom over the first part of this tract.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.397

Martin reveals a mood opposite to his jaunty confidence, one of self questioning and re-examination of his cause. He tells his reader of his trust in God, that sustains him in adversity and gives him and his fellows strength to oppose the ecclesiastical settlement whatever the cost;

But tell them from me, that we fear not men, that can kill but the body; because we fear that God, who can cast both body and soul into unquenchable fire. And tell them also this. That the more blood the Church loseth, the more life and blood it gets. When the fearful sentence pronounced against the persecutors of the truth is executed upon them, I would then gladly know, whether they who go about thus to shed our blood, or we whose blood crieth for vengeance against them, shall have the worst end of the staff. We are sure to possess our souls in everlasting peace, whensoever we leave this earthly tabernacle; and in the mean time we know that an hair of our head cannot fall to the ground without the will of our heavenly Father ... <sup>1</sup>

This fanatic certainty of the righteousness of his cause lies behind the pamphlets of Marprelate from his first appearance, and was a constant mark of the puritan extremists. John Penry was a fine example of the few who went to their deaths resolutely rather than compromise with what they felt to be God's will. The Civil War was to show what such men could do when they had shed the belief in passive resistance only.

After stating his faith Martin consoles himself with the thought that failure does not necessarily prove the badness of a cause; he is undeterred from his enterprise. For the last time he reiterates

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.398.



his challenge to the bishops, inviting them to decide the contest either by logical refutation of his arguments, or by public disputation, offering to appear himself if promised that he will not be molested unless defeated in argument. He associates himself with a whole tradition of English protestant and puritan reformers that have demanded more than the bishops are prepared to grant, including in his list Tyndale, Frith, Barnes, Hooper, Foxe, Cartwright, Travers, Fenner and Penry. The bishops should answer the arguments of all these men, living or dead, by reason and debate, not by "slanders, ribaldry, scurrility, reviling, imprisonment and torture."<sup>1</sup> Martin appeals here for freedom of speech, for open argument against persecution; like so much of this pamphlet, his words hint at developments still half a century away. Hard experience had brought Martin to this position, and gave depth to his insights. That a Presbyterian system might have given less rather than more freedom of opinion does not invalidate Martin's appeal for the essential condition for political journalism.

After this firm and expressive statement of his position Martin clears up a point that Bancroft had stressed in his sermon on February 9, 1589 at Paul's Cross, when he accused Martin and the puritans in general of encouraging the laity to spoil the Church of her lands. Martin denies that he sanctioned the alienation of Church livings to

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.404.

the laity; this was doubtless his sincere opinion, but he had not been above hinting the attraction of the bishops' wealth to the Queen and laity.<sup>1</sup> Now he took the opportunity to discard this device, reminding the bishops that they were the principal despoilers of their sees, alienating revenues for profit without thought of their successors. This, like Bancroft's point, had a solid content of truth.

Martin also makes his last and most powerful protest about the way the bishops deal with their adversaries, using arbitrary courts outside the common law, empowered to imprison their opponents indefinitely. They are themselves prosecutors, judges, jury and gaolers, able to use the 'ex officio' oath to force a man to accuse himself, against common law. As the sole witnesses, they can foist any revolutionary doctrines on the accused, whom they will insult and brand as a liar if he complains. Martin prophesies that this will extend to mutilation and perpetual imprisonment if left unchecked, and commends the matter to the judgement of every Englishman that loves his prince and the liberty of his country. Martin proved a true prophet; nearly half a century later Prynne, Burton and Bastwick were to lose their ears for attacks on the episcopate. Though sentenced by the Star Chamber and not the High Commission, their case raised the point Marprelate and the Elizabethan puritan lawyers stated so forcibly,

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<sup>1</sup> See p.

and which was to be an important factor in the breaking out of the Civil War.

Regaining something of his old humour Martin offers his reader a summary of More Work for Cooper; the flashing wit of this part of the tract could have come from none other than the author of the major tracts. In it he had anticipated The Protestation's defence of Martinism: "...and as I did then, so do I still heartily rejoice to think that all the honestest and best affected subjects her Majesty hath, will one day become Martinists."<sup>1</sup> He also issued a respectful challenge to the puritans who disapproved of him to say why, that he might amend his faults or defend himself. Martin's critical interest in style, as well as his wit, show in his remarks on Robert Some, an episcopal defender then exchanging arguments with Penry:

The next pretty thing to this was, to my remembrance, Chaplain Some confuted with the bald sheath of his own dagger; wherein all his short cuts, Latin apoph<sup>h</sup>tegms and childish pen-and-inkhorn proverbs were wholly inverted upon himself. I then said, and so say I still, that if it were not for those whom our bishops hate and persecute, it is known they would make a mad piece of confuting the Brownists and other sectaries amongst them ...

This, if you know him not, is the very same doctor that, in publishing three pretty treatises, hath so handled the matter by a geometrical dimension, that the last, if it be well scanned, is the same with the first, and the middlemost all one with them both. The man, in all likelihood, never goeth without a little saunce bell in his pocket, and that doth nothing else but, Ting, Ting, Ting! And what doth it

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.411-412

Ting? If you give good ear, nothing else, I warrent you, but 'My sermons,' 'My writings', 'My reasons' 'My arguments'; and all is 'My, My, My,'; as if the depth of all learning were included in the channel of his brain. This is even he that, let him write a many books as he will (though he should never so much disguise himself, and conceal his name), yet we should be sure to know him by one of these rapping figures. Either by 'hitting the white', or by 'missing the butt,' or by 'resting on his reason,' or by thirty-two dozen of full points, or by some such broken wooden dish or other. 1

Martin concludes The Protestation with an invitation to the reader to his imminent marriage; "...thou shalt be better welcome unto me than the best lord catercap of them all; and so tell them from me when thou wilt."<sup>2</sup> This was the last the Elizabethans were to hear from Martin Marprelate.

#### D. The Literary Wits

Richard Bancroft was active in the investigations for the author and printers of the Marprelate Tracts. I have mentioned his influential sermon at St. Paul's Cross, bitterly attacking the puritans. Realising that the usual episcopal writers did not have the requisite talents for answering Martin, Bancroft appears to have engaged a number of the literary wits of the time, from the Elizabethan equivalent

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.413-415.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.417

of Grub Street, to reply in kind.<sup>1</sup> Information about the authorship of the work of this group of writers has been summarised by McKerrow.<sup>2</sup> They were late on the scene; some poems appeared in spring 1589, and the prose pamphlets followed in the second half of the year. The contribution of the wits was disappointing; their pamphlets attempted with small success to imitate Martin's comic anecdotes and witty abuse, turning his methods mechanically against the puritans. The wits show neither knowledge nor interest in the theological issues; Pierce suggests that they were briefed with a number of points against the puritans,<sup>3</sup> which the similarity of their indictment makes possible. All accuse the puritans of being revolutionary extremists, bent on innovation in both church and state. Pierce lists five points that recur; Martin is accused of blasphemy, and the puritans of treasonable infringement of the royal supremacy; of envious desire to spoil the Church of her wealth; of seeking democratic rule in the Church; and of kinship with the Anabaptists and Family of Love.

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<sup>1</sup> Recommending Bancroft for the Bishopric of London, Whitgift wrote, "By his advice, that Course was taken, which did principally stop Martin & his Fellows' mouths viz: to have them answered after their own vein in writing" Reprinted in Stuart Barton Babbage, Puritanism and Richard Bancroft, (London, 1962) p.40.

<sup>2</sup> The Works of Thomas Nashe, V, 45-65

<sup>3</sup> A Historical Introduction, p.220-221.

(i) Pappe with a Hatchet

Pappe with a Hatchet was probably written by John Lyly; he felt the need to justify his method of reply: "I was loath so to write as I haue done, but that I learnde, that he that drinks with cutters, must not be without his ale dagger; nor hee that buckles with Martin, without his lauish termes."<sup>1</sup> Lyly adopts Martin's device of treating controversy like a street fight, and is determined to outdo Martin in railing:

Roome for a royster; so thats well sayd, itch a little further for a good fellowe. Now have at you all my gaffers of the rayling religion, tis I that must take you a peg lower. 2

Nay, if rime and reason bee both forestalde, Ile rayle, if Martin haue not barreld vp all rakehell words: if he haue, what car I to knocke him on the head with his owne hatchet. He hath taken vp all the words for his obscenitie: obscenitie? Naie, now I am too nice, squirrilitie were a better word: well, let me alone to squirrell them.

Martin, thinkst thou thou hast so good a wit, as none can outwrangle thee? Yes Martin, wee will play three a vies wits: art thou so backt that none dare blade it with thee? Yes Martin, we will drop vie stabbes. 3

Lyly's style differs from that of Martin in Lyly's greater love of "artificiality", his carefully balanced sentences, insistent antitheses and heaped up adjectives. A particular interest of Lyly in this tract

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<sup>1</sup> The Complete Works of John Lyly, III, 394.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.394.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.399

is telling stories of the lecherous exploits of puritans; "pewes and stewes are rime in their religion".<sup>1</sup>

(ii) Martin's Months Minde

Martin's Months Minde is written in a style even more carefully worked than that of Lyly. Here the unknown author shows his skill at pun antithesis:

"No crosse in the browe at Baptisme", but never so many, at any time in the bagge. "No bells", but Libells, and lables of their own. "No Homelies read," but their own Home-lies preached. "No praying" either for women labouring with child, or thanksgiving for "women delivered". "No more praying against thunder and lightning", than against "sparrow blasting". 2

There are touches here which resemble the technique of the Churchmen of the next centuries against dissent, as it is found in Samuel Butler and Swift; the author reduces the objections to vestments to mere fashion: "And these could 'not abide rounde heads to weare square cappes', that yet could brooke a round trencher (especiallie at another mans table".<sup>3</sup> The tract purports to be an account of Martin's death and funeral, given with ribald abuse and grotesque physical detail. In a deathbed confession, Martin repents of his "Foolerie", "Ribaudrie" and "Blasphemie", and admits that his tracts were designed to reach both the great and the common people.

(iii) The Pasquil Tracts

The three 'Pasquil' tracts were originally attributed to Nash,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.402

<sup>2</sup> Nashe, Works, ed. Grosart, I, 151-152

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.151.

but McKerrow points out that they are more likely to have been written by a clergyman who had adopted a Martinising style for the occasion. His language is less highly worked than that of the other wits, and he is more conversant with the theological issues at stake, as is shown by his last tract, a reply to Penry's A Treatise of Reformation (1590). In his first tract Pasquil promises a Lives of The Saints which will rival Martin's collection of scandal: "There shall you read of that reuerend Elder of your Church, who being<sup>e</sup> credited with the stocke of the poore, pertaining to the Bride-well house of Canterburie, to sette men a work, was compelled to keepe it to himselfe, because no poore folkes of the household of Faith could be found in all that Cittie."<sup>1</sup> In the second and third tracts the comic touches grow fewer. Sometimes the author's rhetoric is cumbersome, as when he laments that Bernard Ochino had been turned back to Rome by the diversity of sects in England:

Vnhappie man, that beeing once lightned, looked backe to that Scicilian Aetna, that spues vppe smoake and sulphure into the worlde, to put out the eyes of men; Vnhappie Englande, that by<sup>the</sup> diuersities of opinions in Religion, sette so many handes on hys shoulders to thrust him downe, that was so ready with a turne to ouerturne. 2

Of this group of writers Pasquil is the one most troubled with the threat Martin represents to the Elizabethan ideal of ordered government.

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<sup>1</sup> Nash, Works, ed. McKerrow, I, 61.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.75.



Martin looses the bond of obedience which holds her people to Elizabeth by suggesting she is keeping them from salvation. Pasquil strikes a gloomy note of foreboding; the common people are only too ready to join, "rowtes, ryots, commotions, insurrections, and plaine rebellions, when they grow brainsicke, or any new toy taketh them in the head: they neede no Trauars nor Martin to encrease their giddines."<sup>1</sup> Pasquil is also concerned to refute Martin's claim that the prince is entitled to do what he likes with church lands and revenues. He accuses Martin of tempting the laity to further reformation with the bait of the bishops' lands, and reminds him that if the bishops are spoiled little of their wealth will go to support the godly preachers that the puritans desire. Pasquil's sincerity is proved by the boldness with which he proceeds to warn Elizabeth, enlarging on the dire consequences of princes seizing Church lands, even mentioning the Bishopric of Ely, which the Queen had left vacant for the purpose of using its revenues.

(iv) An Almond for a Parrat

By far the best of the anti-Martinist works is An Almond for a Parrat, published in February or March 1590, which Donald J. McGinn has claimed for Nashe, an attribution accepted by G.R. Hibbard.<sup>2</sup> The pamphlet is flexibly constructed, varying attack on the puritans' ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.81.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Nashe. A Critical Introduction, p.37.

with stories of their misdeeds, very much in the manner of The Epistle. Nashe does not scruple to name his butts, concentrating on Cartwright, as head of the puritan movement, and Penry, whom he considered the author of the tracts. By this time the information gathered by episcopal agents was available to Nashe, who uses it copiously.

The style of An Almond for a Parrat is more elaborate than that of Martin, but has more energy than that of the other wits; Hibbard describes it as "luridly grotesque."<sup>1</sup>

WElcome, Mayster Martin, from the dead, and much good ioy may you haue of your stage-like resurrection. It was told me by the vndanted purseuants of your sonnes, and credibly beleueed in regard of your sinnes, that your grout-headed holinesse had turnd vppe your heeles like a tired iade in a medow, and snorted out your scornefull soule, like a mesled hogge on a muckehill, which had it not beene false, as the deuill woulde haue it, that long tongd doctresse, Dame Law., muste haue beene faine (in spite of insperation) to haue giuen ouer speaking in the congregation, and employ her Parrats tong in stead of a winde-clapper to scarre the crows from thy carrion. 2

Nashe displays a fertility of invention beyond that of Martin in heaping up fantastical terms of abuse. Hibbard considers that the study of the Marprelate Tracts helped him develop his characteristic style. Nashe's dislike of puritans is quite genuine, but his work gives more impression of enjoyment of satire than fear of their success.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.48

<sup>2</sup> Nashe, Works, ed. McKerrow, III, p.344.

Here he challenges Martin:

Much good do it you, M. Martin, how like you my stile,  
am not I old Ille ego qui quondam at ye besleeuing of  
a sichophant? Alas, poore idiot, thou thinkest no man  
can write but thy selfe, or frame his pen to delight  
except he straine curtesie with one of thy Northren  
figures; but if authority do not moderate the fiery  
seruence of my enflamed zeale, ile assaile thee from  
terme to terme, with Archilochus, in such a compleat  
armour of Iambicks, as the very reflexcye of my fury  
shall make thee driue thy father before thee to the  
gallows, for begetting thee in such a bloody houre.  
O God, that we two might bee permitted but one quarter,  
to try it out by the teeth for the best benefice in  
England, then would I distill my wit into incke, and  
my soule into argumentes, but I would driue this Danus  
from his dunghill, and make him faune like a dog for  
fauour at the magistrates feete. 1

Nashe recognises Martin as a worthy antagonist; it was unfortunate for literature that he could not take up the challenge.

Nashe equals Martin in his comic tales, such as that of Giles Wiggington being so confounded by the entrance of the local adulterer to his sermon that he inadvertently included him in the Trinity.

Nashe stresses the social characteristics and personal motivation of the puritans rather than their ideas for the reformation of the Church. They are hypocritical and lecherous, motivated by their appetites instead of their religion, proud and ignorant. This passage parodies their alleged belief in an inner light rather than formal education:

They [the apostles] were none of these Cartercaps, Graduates, nor Doctors, therefore why should we tie our Ministrie to the prophane studies of the Vniuersitie?

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.369.



What is Logicke but the highe waie to wrangling, containyng in it a world of bibble babble. Neede we anie of your Greeke, Latine, Hebrue, or anie such gibbrige, when wee haue the word of God in English? Go to, go to, you are a great company of vaine men, that stand vpon your degrees and tongues, with tittle tattle, I cannot tell what, when as (if you looke into the matter as you ought) the Apostles knew neare a Letter of the booke. Iwis it were not two pins hurt if your Colledges were fired ouer your heades, and you turnde a begging forth your fellowshipes, like Fryers and Monkes, vp and downe the Countrie. I, marie, sir, this is somewhat like, now Martin speaks like himselfe; I dare saie for him, good man, he could be contented there were nere a maister of Art, Bachelour of Diuinitie, Doctor or Bishop in England, on that condition he prest Fishermen, scullers, Coopers, Stichers, Weauers, and Coblers into their places. 1

Nashe laughs at the alleged democratic tendencies of the Presbyterian discipline, using two of Martin's heroes to ridicule it, the fiery Dame Lawson and Cliff the godly cobbler of Battle Bridge; "Would you not laugh to see Cli., the Cobler, and New., the souter, ierking out theyr elbowes in euerye Pulpit? Why, I am sure Ladie Law. would fast mans flesh a whole moneth together, but shee woulde giue either of them a gowne cloth on that condition."<sup>2</sup> Martin had made no mention of Cliff or Newman preaching.

Nash satirically describes the careers of Cartwright and Penry, using them as representative figures of the Presbyterian movement, showing through them that the roots of the movement are personal eccentricity and malice, erected into rules. Nashe must surely share some

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.350

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.351

of the credit for creating the popular idea of a puritan; An Almond for a Parrat is in the same tradition as the work of Ben Jonson, Samuel Butler, Roger L'Estrange and Jonathan Swift in this respect. Nashe's pamphlet shows signs of his future qualities; his was the only work of the wits to present a compelling picture of those they set out to discredit.

(v) The End of the Controversy

Only two pamphlets defended Martin and his methods amid the chorus of puritan disapproval. Both were published late in 1589, possibly by the same author, and both borrowed something of Martin's manner to attack the bishops and their defenders. M. Some laid open in his colours, attributed by Matthew Sutcliffe to Throckmorton,<sup>1</sup> confuted Robert Some's Second Godly Treatise in a Martinising manner. A Dialogue wherein is laid open the tyrannical dealing of L. Bishoppes against Gods children, is written in the form of a spirited conversation between puritan, papist, reading minister and Jack of both sides, while on the road to London. The puritan praises Marprelate highly, supporting all his allegations against the bishops. This pamphlet owes much to Diotrophes; the dialogue is lively, and the characters well differentiated, though the wit is not so brilliant as in the Marprelate series. Both of these pamphlets were printed in the type known as

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<sup>1</sup> An Answer to Job Throckmorton (1695) reprinted in, An Introductory Sketch, p.179.

"Waldegrave's letter"<sup>1</sup> which he had passed on to Penry. Where they were printed, who printed them, and whether they were written by the author of the Marprelate Tracts, remains in doubt.

The remaining contributions to the controversy lack interest. Plaine Percevall the Peacemaker of England, written by Richard Harvey, adopted a middle position between Martin and the wits, deploring the methods of both, but noticeably more bitter against the wits; it was an early blow in the controversy between Nashe and the Harvey brothers. Richard's advice to Martin to give himself up must have been one of the most unreal suggestions of the whole affair. Francis Bacon also testified to the dislike of some, well affected to the office of bishop, for the lewd tales and humour of their defenders, and impartially criticised both bishops and puritans. He did not see fit to publish his contribution.<sup>2</sup> The campaign of the wits ended with the publication of The firste parte of Pasquil's Apology in June 1590, probably merely because Martin could not reply, though no doubt the bishops were glad to have the affair forgotten.

The investigations seeking the Marprelate press had accidentally uncovered the underground Presbyterian organisation, which Whitgift broke up with increasing severity, even arresting the respectable

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<sup>1</sup> McGinn, John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy, p.166.

<sup>2</sup> An Advertisement touching the Controversies of the Church of England, An Introductory Sketch, p.146-168.

Cartwright. The Elizabethan state could not tolerate what amounted to a party in its midst. From the early 1590's the Presbyterian wing of the puritans was destroyed as a political force, and was only to re-emerge in the next reign. While the episcopal writers, headed by Bancroft, continued to attack the puritans, the Presbyterian press ceased to function as the organisation that had maintained it collapsed. Of the men involved in the Marprelate affair, Udall died in imprisonment, and Penry was executed on a trumped-up charge, but in reality for his part in publishing Martin. Of the gentry who harboured the press, all were heavily fined; Throckmorton alone escaped any penalty. Waldegrave prospered as printer to James in Scotland, and returned to England with his master. The affair, however, was not forgotten; in the Civil War an edition of Hay any Worke for Cooper was published, as was a relation of Udall's sufferings.

Richard Overton took the name of Martin Mar-priest, son of Martin Marprelate, paradoxically to attack the Civil War Presbyterians. The subject still roused heat when the nineteenth and twentieth centuries turned their attention to Marprelate.

#### E. Conclusion

The importance of the Marprelate Tracts in the history of political controversy is that they take to a logical conclusion the tendencies in Field's Admonition, and the pamphlets that followed it, in appealing

to a wider audience than usually read theological controversy. The notoriety the tracts attained, and the concern they gave to the Church hierarchy, bear witness to the success of their author. Martin was a forerunner in political journalism, capable of finding a new approach and style to secure popularity. He created a literary personality, with a strikingly individual tone of voice, to ridicule the bishops, and dramatised his clash with them. Bancroft showed his awareness that there had been a major change in puritan controversy by encouraging a new group, the literary wits, to answer the Marprelate Tracts. Though in this case their literary skill fell below that of Martin, and they lacked his commitment and knowledge, both they and he point to the part the man of letters would play in the development of political journalism. Though Martin did not find favour with the Presbyterian movement as a whole, his achievement was built on theirs, and would not have been possible if a party had not already been created which in its organisation and use of the press anticipated developments of the next century. As it was, the aim as well as the technique of Martin was before its time; opinions which had merely offended when expressed in scholarly form by Cartwright and Travers, seemed treasonable when advanced in a manner openly intended to arouse widespread pressure for reform. Bacon summed up his objections to the controversy with this statement: "Lastly, whatsoever he pretendeth, the people is no meet arbitrator; but rather the quiet



modest and private assemblies of the learned."<sup>1</sup> It was not until the Civil War and the fuller development of parties in the state that the pamphleteer would enjoy adequate protection while making such an appeal as that of Martin Marprelate.

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<sup>1</sup> Introductory Sketch, p.168.

## CHAPTER TWO

THE LEVELLER PAMPHLETEERS, JOHN LILBURN,  
RICHARD OVERTON, AND WILLIAM WALWYNA. Introduction: the press before the Civil War

After the failure of the Elizabethan Presbyterians' attempt to bring in the discipline, the press did not play an important role in the nation's political life until the events leading to the Civil War. During the reign of James I the puritans, after the millenary petition had been rejected, contented themselves with preaching the individual's salvation to their loyal congregations, and leaving the contentious matter of Church government alone. In the field of secular politics neither King nor Parliament was tempted to resolve the tension between them by recourse to the press.

The reign of Charles I and the policies of Strafford and Archbishop Laud brought about a steady deterioration of religious and civil unity. This was only occasionally reflected in the press, because of the severe penalties of infringing the censorship. In 1631 Alexander Leighton, a Scottish divine, was mutilated by Star Chamber sentence for a printed attack on the government of bishops. More representative of a strong body of opinion in England was William Prynne, Presbyterian lawyer, who wrote with bigoted fervour against all the conventional objects of puritan hatred in pamphlet after pamphlet. In 1632 his reflections on the court in his Histriomastix caused him to suffer mutilation in the pillory and subsequent imprisonment. Such penalties

could not repress Prynne, who proceeded to attack the bishops directly in A Breviate of the Bishops Intolerable Usurpations, (1635) and News from Ipswich (1636).

Prynne had only limited qualities as a pamphleteer. His latest biographer has written; "On literary grounds it is easy to explain the neglect of Prynne. A wearisome prolixity, a humourless scurrility, a complete lack of depth: those qualities are commonly, and rightly, associated with his pamphleteering."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless he had a talent for some of the most violent invective of the period, and a memory capable of citing an immense number of authorities to support his views; the store of uncritical learning strewn in the margins of his pamphlets drew the contemptuous epithet "Marginal Prynne" from Milton.<sup>2</sup> He also possessed immense energy, (he was possibly the most prolific writer of the Civil War) and a fearless disregard for the consequences of his actions. All this combined to make him the most striking of the few that defied the stringent censorship of the press in the 1630's.

Prynne was sentenced by the Star Chamber to lose what remained of his ears in the pillory, and to be branded S.L. (Seditious Libeller)

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<sup>1</sup> William Lamont. Marginal Prynne, 1603-69, (London, 1963), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> Sonnet, On the new forcers of Conscience, under the Long Parliament. The Sonnets of John Milton, ed. J.S. Smart, (First pub.1921, reprinted Oxford, 1966), p.117. Milton cancelled the line containing this which, addressing the Presbyterians, hoped Parliament would, "Clip ye as close as marginal P--'s ears."

on his cheeks. He had two companions in his sentence. Henry Burton was a divine who had preached two sermons against the policies of Laud, and had published them with an additional appeal when summoned before the High Commission court. John Bastwick was a physician who had been imprisoned for two attacks in Latin upon the bishops that he had published in 1633. The cause of his further punishment was a tract in English called The Letany of Dr. John Bastwick, published while he was in prison. This new and ribald vilification of the English Church hierarchy is remarkable for Bastwick's sense of humour, which shows in his sketches of the stately progress of Laud from Lambeth to the High Commission. These rival the similar work of Marprelate in their satiric quality, which caused one of the people to whom Bastwick read the tract to "laugh as if he had bin tickled, so that I never saw a man more pleasant at a peece of grillery."<sup>1</sup>

The scenes at the pillory when these three were to be mutilated showed the unpopularity brought on the bishops by Laud's policy of enforcing ceremonies and removing the puritan vicars and lecturers. The prisoners acted out the parts of protestant martyrs before a large, emotional and sympathetic crowd, turning the occasion into one of the triumphs of the puritan movement. The incident was reported

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<sup>1</sup> A Just Defence of John Bastwick, p.10-11. Quoted in William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, (Columbia 1938, reprinted 1957), p.252. Bastwick introduced the word "grole", (a fool or shallow, trifling man) from the Dutch. From this he derived "grillery".

at once, together with details of the trials of the three, in a pamphlet entitled, A Brief Relation of Certain speciall and most material passages and Speeches in the Starre-Chamber; Occasioned and delivered June 14th 1637 at the Censure of those three worthy Gentlemen, Dr. Bastwicke, Mr. Burton, and Mr. Prynne. Written in the manner of objective reporting, possibly by one who had taken shorthand notes at the pillory, this competent piece shows the readiness of the London puritans to extend the effect of the incident, and transform what was intended as a disgrace into a powerful stimulus for their movement. Later we shall see the influence this had on John Lilburne, who at twenty two was prepared to imitate and even surpass the example of his elders.

As civil grievances combined with ecclesiastical to make the government of Charles universally unpopular, the summoning of the Short Parliament gave the gentry, led by Pym, the opportunity to state their grievances. It was then that the leading Parliamentarians first had their speeches published to reach a wider audience than the House of Commons. After the Scots had forced the summoning of the Long Parliament in November 1640, Charles I found himself facing an alliance of Parliament with the city and the puritan clergy, the latter not least important for their control over public opinion. With the abolition of the Star Chamber and High Commission courts, the arrest of Laud, the execution of Strafford, and finally the failure of the king's attempt to arrest the five members, the possibility of war became

more and more likely.

It was only after the opening of the Long Parliament that the press, undeterred by a now toothless censorship, began to take an active part in discussing the changes in Church and state. Both King and Parliament found it necessary to involve people of all classes in their struggle, previously confined to the few. The Parliament in particular depended for safety on the support of the London populace; and its partisans, with access to the vast majority of the country's printing presses, needed no urging to provide their interpretation of the events of the day. The increase in numbers of pamphlets and newspapers published from the beginning of the Long Parliament was remarkable. George Thomason, a London bookseller, who set out to make as complete a collection of them as he could, gathered twenty two pamphlets and twenty four issues of newspapers in the last months of 1640. He followed this with the numbers set out in this table:

|      |       | Pamphlets |       | Papers |
|------|-------|-----------|-------|--------|
| 1641 | ..... | 717       | ..... | 721    |
| 1642 | ..... | 1966      | ..... | 2134   |
| 1643 | ..... | 1091      | ..... | 1496   |
| 1644 | ..... | 692       | ..... | 1368   |
| 1645 | ..... | 694       | ..... | 1419   |
| 1646 | ..... | 804       | ..... | 1310   |
| 1647 | ..... | 1058      | ..... | 1472   |
| 1648 | ..... | 1408      | ..... | 2036   |
| 1649 | ..... | 777       | ..... | 1346   |

After 1649 the number of pamphlets in Thomason's collection stayed constant around four or five hundred a year until a sharp increase

again at the Restoration.<sup>1</sup> The 1640's, when the government of England was unstable and uncertain, contain some of the most interesting material of the century for the student of political journalism. This period enjoyed a relatively free press, thanks to the inability of governments to impose efficient restrictions; after 1650 Cromwell was able to keep a much better hold on the press.

The main controversies of the 1640's were, very briefly: the attack on the bishops, 1640-1642; the constitutional argument between the Royalists and Parliamentarians in the early years of the war, 1642-1644; the controversy over freedom of conscience between Presbyterians and Independents, 1644-1646; and the appeal for reform by the Levellers, England's first democratic political party, 1645-1649.<sup>2</sup> From this mass of material I have selected two subjects from the decade, which best illustrate the developments in political journalism that I am following. I shall deal briefly with the earlier political writings of John Milton, in a separate chapter, and my main topic will be the pamphlets of the Leveller writers, John Lilburn, Richard Overton and William Walwyn. These are my reasons for this selection. Milton was the first major literary figure to engage wholeheartedly in political journalism, and foreshadows, despite the

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<sup>1</sup> A Catalogue of the Thomason Tracts, (London, 1908) Introduction, p. xxi.

<sup>2</sup> William Haller, Religion and Liberty in the Puritan Revolution, (New York, 1955) provides the coverage on which I depend for this list.

obvious differences, the commitment of the Augustan men of letters to politics. His success and failure highlight the peculiar talent required for effective political writing. The Levellers developed the press in new ways to bring together and organise a large, popular party, and put pressure on those in power for the radical reform of many aspects of society. Their leaders believed in the power of the press to enlighten sections of the community that had previously played no part in national politics; Samuel Hartlib expressed their hope more concisely than they themselves: "The art of printing will so spread knowledge, that the common people, knowing their own rights and liberties, will not be governed by the way of oppression."<sup>1</sup> With such confidence, the Leveller pamphleteers invented new techniques of political journalism to reach their audience, and pushed the principle of appealing to the people for active support farther than any other writers of the period.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A Description of the famous Kingdom of Macaria, (1641), reprinted in The Harleian Miscellany, I, p.584. Quoted by Don M. Wolfe, Leveller Manifestoes, (New York, 1944), p.107.

<sup>2</sup> This is a convenient point to examine the composition of the Levellers' audience, from which the Leveller party was recruited. The Levellers' appeal, as we shall see, was addressed to the common people in general, as opposed to the rich and powerful, and was based on the broad principles of reason and justice. Lilburne considered himself one of the gentry, and did not attack the class as such, but his criticism of society was not likely to attract them. The men who read his pamphlets and formed his party were "the middle sort of people" (Lilburne's expression; quoted in H.N. Brailsford, The Levellers and the English Revolution, London, 1961, p.10) the small tradesmen, apprentices, journeymen and artisans of London, and their fellows in the New Model army. Lilburne defined his interest as, "the hobnails,



I shall in this chapter examine the kind of appeal made by the Leveller pamphleteers to their public, from the time when they spoke only for themselves, through the growth of their party around the compelling personality of John Lilburne, until its suppression by Cromwell in 1649. I shall follow the development of the writings of Lilburne, Overton and Walwyn in a roughly chronological order, dealing with important pamphlets at length. I am not attempting a comprehensive history of Leveller pamphleteering, which has been

Note 2, p.97, contd.

clouted shoes, the private soldiers, the leather and woollen aprons and laborious and industrious people in England." (The Upright Mans Vindication, (1653), p.15. Quoted, Brailsford, op.cit. p.10). The Leveller party aspired to a national organisation, but its real strength lay in London, the home counties, and the New Model. Its followers were not the lowest in the social scale, and excluded, for instance, the large class of agricultural labourers, who would not have been included in the Leveller franchise. C.B. Macpherson, in The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Hobbes to Locke, (Oxford, 1962), calculates that those excluded by the Leveller franchise, servants and those receiving poor relief, comprised just over half of the males of voting age). The Levellers paid less attention to the countryside than the town, though their programme did contain the abolition of base tenures, attractive to copyholding peasant farmers. (See Brailsford, op.cit. p.477 et.seq. for a discussion of the Levellers and the agrarian question).

The Levellers were the nearest the seventeenth century got to a democratic, popular party, composed of men who, until the unsettling conditions of the Civil War, had played no part in national politics, but were coming to believe that they should have a share in their country's government.

provided by Joseph Frank,<sup>1</sup> or an account of Leveller principles and ideas, except as they form part of the pamphlets I deal with.

B. Freedom of Conscience: 1638-1646

(i) John Lilburne

John Lilburne, whose personality played so great a part in moulding the image of the Levellers, was a man unlikely to have remained in obscurity in any generation. The younger son of a gentleman, Lilburne was apprenticed in London after a grammar school education. Lilburne's grasp of politics was to develop during the Civil War, forced by experience of a time of crisis. At his entry onto the political scene in 1637 he was a young man of twenty two, without his later insight, but already possessed of the reckless courage that was to distinguish his career. It is not clear whether he was already a member of a Baptist congregation, but his background was that of separatist puritanism under Laud; his reading, puritan divines and Foxe's Book of Martyrs. As yet the difference between the Presbyterians and the sects were submerged in hostility to the Anglican Church, in which the Presbyterians took the lead. Lilburne's heroes in 1637 were Prynne, Burton and Bastwick, whom he visited in prison and did his best to help. Lilburne performed various services

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<sup>1</sup> The Levellers; A History of the Writings of Three Seventeenth Century Social Democrats: John Lilburn, Richard Overton, William Walwyn, (Cambridge, Mass., 1955).

for the three men, including that of secretary, and finally took Bastwick's Letany to Holland in order to get it printed. Thus Lilburne had a thorough insight into the way the saints organised resistance to the Church establishment, and on his return he was able to show what he had learnt from his mentors. He was arrested, imprisoned and condemned by the Star Chamber to be whipped two miles at the cart's tail and then put in the pillory. Lilburne defied the Star Chamber, refusing to swear its ex officio oath, asserted the righteousness of his cause, and published from prison an account of his trial,<sup>1</sup> smuggling it to friends in London.

Lilburne's second pamphlet, A Worke of the Beast (1638) gave an account of his whipping and pillorying; it is worth examining as it shows how his Leveller pamphlets were influenced by his early career, and how to him all seemed part of one stand for liberty. The main difference between Lilburne's tract and A Brief Relation is its intense personal quality. Lilburne opens:

Upon Wednesday the said 18 of Aprill, Having noe certain notice of the execution of my Censure, till this present morning, I prepared my selfe by prayer unto God, that he would make good his promise, to be vvith me & enable me to undergoe my Affliction vvith joyfullnes and courage: and that he would bee a mouth and vtterance vnto mee to enable me to speake that which might make for his greatest honour. 2

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<sup>1</sup> The Christian Mans Triall, (1638).

<sup>2</sup> A Worke of the Beast, in Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution, ed. William Haller, (3 vols; New York, 1934), II, 5.

Lilburne immediately strikes the note of the puritan saint, conscious of the role he must play in demonstrating the truth. In his hands the convention is very fresh, because of the unusual openness of his character, which enables him to recount his personal experiences with simplicity and directness, appealing to the reader's sympathy. Lilburne does not conceal such details as his brief discouragement on learning that he is to be whipped on the way to the pillory instead of merely when in it.

When writing a factual narrative Lilburne's style is straightforward and his sentences short; he wrote as he no doubt spoke. One extract gives a fair example of the narrative, and also shows Lilburne's deliberate intention to secure the utmost publicity for what he had to say.

And as we went along the Strand, many friends spoke to me & asked me how I did, & bid me be cherfull, to whom I replied, I was merry and cheerfull: and was upheld with a diuine and heauenly supportation, comforted with the sweet consolations of Gods spirit. And about the middle of the Strand, there came a Friend and bid me speake with boldnesse. To whom I replied, when the time comes soe I will, for then if I should haue spoken and spent my strength, it would haue been but as water spilt on the ground, in regard of the noyse and presse of people. And alsoe at that time I was not in a fitt temper to speake: because the dust much troubled mee, and the Sunne shined very hot upon mee. And the Tipstaffe man at the first would not let mee haue my hatt to keepe the vehement heate of the Sunne from my head. 1

The ordeal of the pillory is meticulously told, including several offers

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.8

to remit part of his sentence if Lilburne would acknowledge himself at fault. Then Lilburne gives his speech from the pillory verbatim; in it he explained why he was punished and made a long vehement attack on the bishops, proving them to be descended from the Pope and thence from the Beast of the Revelation. Here his sentences become longer, clause being piled upon clause in the common manner of mid-seventeenth century pamphlet prose. The following passage shows how the long sentence is not difficult to understand, but approximates to actual speech in that individual units of meaning are merely tacked together with connectives instead of forming a complex structure:

It is true, I am a young man and noe Scoller, according to that which the world counts Scollership, yet I have obtayned mercie of the Lord to be faithfull, & hee by a divine prouidence hath brought me hither this day, & I speake to you in the name of the Lord, being assisted with the spirit and power of the God of Heaven and earth, & I speake not the words of rashnes or inconsideratenesse, but the words of sobernes and mature deliberation, for I did consult with my God before I came higher, and desired him that he would direct and enable me to speake that which might be for his glory and the good of his people, And as I am a Souldier fighting under the banner of the great and mighty Captaine the Lord Iesus Christ, and as I looke for that Crowne of immortality which one day I know shall bee set upon my temples, being in the condition I am in, I dare not hold my peace, but speak unto you with boldnes in the might and strength of my God, the things which the Lord in mercy hath made knowne unto my Soule, come life come death. 1

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.21-22.

The influence of the authorised version of the Bible permeates A Worke of the Beast, conditioning both Lilburne's language and the way in which he met his test. He dated his conversion and certainty of election from the experience.

In the midst of his fervent appeals to the crowd to fight in the spiritual battle of Christ, the Star Chamber ordered a "fat lawyer" to tell Lilburne to be silent. Lilburne disregarded this and with his flair for drama proceed<sup>ed</sup> to throw three copies of Bastwick's Letany to the crowd, shouting, "There is part of the bookes for which I suffer, take them among you, and read them."<sup>1</sup> The authorities then had him gagged for the remainder of his sentence, after which he was taken to the Fleet amid open encouragement from the crowd. The narrative continues, with the gaoler's refusal to give Lilburne food or let him have a surgeon to dress his back. Visited by the Warden, who hoped for his submission, Lilburne had sufficient vitality to argue lengthily on the Bishops, and refused to tell how he came by the pamphlets he scattered to the crowd. The pamphlet ends on a note of complete confidence in the victory of the cause. Important for Lilburne's later pamphlets is the readiness with which he can identify himself with something much greater, the cause of God's church, and recount his personal experiences in this framework, using the magnetism of his personality without seeming self

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.22.

centred.

Lilburne followed A Worke of the Beast with five more pamphlets in the next twelve months. They combined the story of his sufferings in prison with scriptural arguments against the bishops. An Answer to Nine Arugments (1638) is a competent though conventional structure of scriptural argument in favour of a separatist church government, interesting in that it shows that Lilburne had mastered this standard mode of puritan controversy sufficiently to construct a long and complicated chain of reasoning. Bastwick later claimed that he had taught Lilburne this particular skill when Lilburne used to visit him in prison.<sup>1</sup> The Poore Mans Cry (1639) shows Lilburne unsure of himself after a long close confinement designed to break his spirit. Depressed by the tyranny of his gaolers and the social injustice of the prison system, and afraid he will be murdered, Lilburne breathes defiance against the prelates: "Though you keep me so close, that there be but few at my death, yet you knowe not what great troupes may com to my burial."<sup>2</sup> In May 1639 he proved this was no empty threat; an open letter scattered by a woman friend among apprentices gathering at Moorfields called for a non-violent demonstration to persuade the Lord Mayor to intercede for Lilburne.<sup>3</sup> The result was

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<sup>1</sup> A Just Defence of John Bastwick (1645), p.15. Quoted Haller, Rise of Puritanism, p.276.

<sup>2</sup> The Poore Mans Cry, p.4

<sup>3</sup> Letter to the Apprentices, May 10, 1639, printed at the end of The Prisoners Plea for a Habeas Corpus (1648).

a serious riot around Laud's palace, which marked the weakening of the Archbishop's position.

At this stage Lilburne protested his loyalty to the King, and agreed with the still united opinion of the puritans in disclaiming any criticism of Charles I and blaming all England's troubles on the bishops. His next appearance on the public scene, six years later, would show his talents developing, and used for new ends.

(ii) William Walwyn

William Walwyn was a London merchant who espoused the Parliamentary side early in the Civil War. His attitude was perhaps the strangest of the three Leveller leaders. Without more than a school education, and without being able to read Latin he was nevertheless a man of broad literary background. He had read the classics in translation and also modern authors, including Montaigne, whose reasonableness he tried to imitate. During the war he became convinced of the doctrine of free justification by faith, and thus of the necessity of religious toleration. In a series of anonymous pamphlets he argued for toleration from a non-sectarian point of view, including even Papists and the most radical sects. In doing so, he became one of the first to voice opposition to the Presbyterian demand for conformity.

The first tract of this kind attributed to him with any certainty is Some Considerations. A discourse concerning the unreasonable difference between The Protestant and the Puritan (1642), calling



for unity among the puritans in the face of the common enemy. This position is repeated and amplified in The Power of Love (1643), which sets out free justification in a manner of gentle charity, stressing the importance of the love of God and of mankind as against persecution for mere difference of opinion. The following extract gives an idea of Walwyn's concern for practical good to be done for the poor:

Judge then by this rule who are of Gods family; looke about and you will finde in these woefull dayes thousands of miserable, distressed, starved, imprisoned Christians: see how pale and wan they looke: how coldly, raggedly, & unwholsomely they are cloathed; live one week with them in their poore houses, lodge as they lodge, eate as they eate, and no oftner, and bee at the same passe to get that wretched food for a sickly wife, and hunger-starved children; (if you dare do this for feare of death or diseases) then walke abroad, and observe the generall plenty of all necessaries, observe the gallant bravery of multitudes of men and women abounding in all things that can be imagined: observe likewise the innumerable numbers of those that have more than sufficeth, Neither will I limit you to observe the inconsiderate people of the world, but the whole body of religious people themselves, and in the very Churches and upon solemne dayes: view them well, and see whether they have not this worlds goods; their silkes, their beavers, their rings, and other divises will testifie they have; I, and the wants and distresses of the poore will testifie that the love of God they have not. 1

Walwyn's quiet tone and appearance of merely stating facts is quite different from the insistence of Lilburne, or the lively violence of Overton's prose. His sentences flow easily, clearly organised and

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<sup>1</sup> The Power of Love (1643) Haller, Tracts on Liberty, II, 274-5. The whole passage is in italics.

well controlled, and he avoids any extravagant emotion.

Walwyn's most influential early pamphlet was The Compassionate Samaritane, (1644), a further plea for toleration of religious differences. He shows his faith in his readers' reasonable nature by phrasing his argument in the language of general reason rather than by referring continually to the scriptures. His first reason for toleration is that, as no man can do other than follow his own reason in interpreting the scriptures, so he should not be persecuted for his judgement, which is not a voluntary act. Walwyn then argues that, as the knowledge of God's will is so uncertain, no man can presume that he is not mistaken in what he considers error. He attacks the Presbyterian divines for claiming authority to punish differences of opinion and urges the reader not to take the separatists at the Presbyterian valuation, but to go and talk to them, and find out what they are really like. Walwyn's peculiar quality among the advocates of toleration, in common with Lord Brooke, was that he did not belong to the sects he defended. In this tract, this disinterest helps Walwyn to give the impression of personifying the very charity and tolerance he urges on others.

(iii) Lilburne and Prynne

Lilburne re-entered politics in a context very different from that of 1638. Released by the Long Parliament, Lilburne joined the army, where he had a distinguished career, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He played a part in the infighting between

Presbyterians and Independents in the army, acting as Cromwell's partisan in the antagonism between him and the Earl of Manchester. In 1644 Lilburne resigned his commission, partly because of his quarrel with Manchester, but principally because he refused to take the Covenant, the only officer to do so. This points to the strength of his feelings against the Presbyterian system.

Meanwhile in London the divisions of the puritans, submerged in dislike of the bishops, had now become the central question; what system of Church government, if any, should replace that of episcopacy? The Westminster Assembly of Divines was dominated by those who favoured some kind of Presbyterianism, but included a small group of Independents, who stressed the autonomy of each individual congregation against the necessity of a uniform state Church. The crucial question was the measure of toleration to be given to those who could not subscribe to Presbyterian orthodoxy. The controversy over toleration had become more embittered since Walwyn's contribution to it, as the Presbyterians felt their opportunity slipping away, and they launched into a series of violent attacks on their adversaries.

The prominent champion of the Presbyterians was William Prynne, who stood for the absolute authority of Parliament, and defended the Presbyterian system principally because he felt the necessity of a new state Church. Prynne's confidence that he personified the will of God was as strong as Lilburne's, and he was unable to disagree without a white heat of anger, expressed by vehement insult. With his

public martyrdom and his prominence in Parliament Prynne was an authority of formidable status. He had shown his antagonism to the freedom of each individual congregation in his Independency Examined of 1644. Truth Triumphant over Falshood, published early in 1645 is hardly less violent than usual, although Prynne is refuting his fellow martyr Burton, now an Independent. In the preface he promises to retract any "unbrotherly" references to his brother Burton; in the light of what follows the promise appears very necessary. In the body of the tract, "my ingested Nocturnal Lucubrations, (borrowed from the houres allotted to my necessary naturall rest) in Vindication of the ancient and undoubted Ecclesiastical Power and Iurisdiction of Parliaments",<sup>1</sup> Prynne vilifies the Independents and asserts Parliament's right to impose whatever church government it pleases.

Lilburne, taking a different view of God's will from that of Prynne, felt compelled to reply; his pamphlet shows his complete reliance, at this stage, on his own personality and the effect it would have on his readers. On January 18, 1645, he wrote a letter to Prynne, and receiving no immediate reply, published it. A Copie of a Letter Written by John Lilburne Lieut. Collonell. To Mr. William Prinne, Esq. pits the authority of one saint against another, as

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle Dedicatory, sig. A4<sup>v</sup> (pt.I).

Lilburne uses their common sufferings under Laud to point Prynne's falling off to join the persecutors. They are both in a privileged position, for people will credit what they say on their reputation; Prynne abused his:

I have seen some of your late writings, which a little diving into, I have found them full of bitter and unsavoury Language against the poore Saints of God, and unspotted waies of Jesus Christ, and finding your Confidence very great but your Arguments very weak and unsound and having received a Talent from the Lord, I conceive myself bound in Conscience to imploy it, and lay it out for my Masters best advantage and I was determined some weekes since to have writ you a few lines in a publique way, and to have told you, you erre not knowing the Scriptures. 1

Lilburne attacks the Presbyterians, contemptuously calling them the "Blacke-Coats", for stopping the press to their opponents, and accuses them of intending to set up a new tyranny worse than that of "their dear fathers the Bishops"<sup>2</sup> He stresses the fact that the liberty of the subject is at stake; while the soldiers have been fighting for their liberties, the Black-Coats have been preparing new oppression. He speaks for the Independents and sects in a stirring challenge to Prynne:

...you and they [the Assembly] thinke you may raile at us cum privilegio, and ranke us among the worst and basest of men, as rooters up of Parliaments and disturbers

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Tracts on Liberty, III, 181-182.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.182.

of States and Common welthes, and so thinke to carry it away without controule, but it may be you will be mistaken, for though we cannot print so fast as you, we can speake and lay downe as strong Arguments for ourselves, as you can for your selves, and therefore being desirous to try a fall with you, though one of your freinds not long since told me, there was a great disproportion betwixt you and me, to write upon controverting the things of God, as there is betwixt a tall Ceder and a little shrub; unto which I replied, goe you, and tell the tall Ceder, the little Shrub will have about<sup>\*</sup>with him. 1. \* [a bout]

Lilburne's dramatic challenge was the first step on a road which would lead him to command far greater popularity than the "tall cedar".

The backbone of Lilburne's argument is given in five propositions, buttressed by quotations from scripture, which include the argument that no temporal power has any spiritual authority, and that no persecution for conscience is from God. Prynne's learning takes a radical blow: Lilburne refuses to accept any of his authorities that prove the civil power has a right to order religion, and demands by what authority out of the word of God it has done so.

This meddling has on the contrary borne the mark of the beast, and Prynne is helping to bring down God's wrath on England by advocating it. The tract relies on biblical language and quotation to prove Prynne to be a soldier of Antichrist, inciting Parliament to wage war against God, "the King of the Saints." Lilburne's object is freedom, but his tone is archaic, reminiscent at times of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.183.

Fifth Monarchists, arguing from knowledge of God's will rather than reason. At the end of the tract he returns to a less rarified level in this contemptuous comment: "It may be; instead of satisfying my desire, you'll run and complaine to Parliament: and presse them upon their Covenant to take vengeance upon me, if you doe I weigh it not."<sup>1</sup>

There could not be a stronger contrast to this highly personal mixture of apocalyptic threats and casual contempt than Walwyn's answer to Prynne's Independency Examined. Walwyn had his pamphlet, published just after Lilburne's letter, entitled A Helpe to the right understanding of a Discourse concerning Independency, Lately published by William Prynne and printed it in the same format as Prynne's tracts. The unwary purchaser could easily have mistaken it for one of Prynne's, in defence of his original pamphlet. Without troubling to argue the case for toleration in detail, Walwyn reflects with ironic detachment on the way a martyr can become a persecutor himself. He suggests various reasons for the change in Prynne; perhaps Prynne hopes to advance himself in the world; perhaps he is merely deficient in understanding, and has made a mistake, an explanation which his publication of Archbishop Laud's diary<sup>2</sup> supports; or

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.186.

<sup>2</sup> Prynne published this to blacken Laud's character, but his confession of his sins, common to many puritan diaries, actually made many sympathise with him.

perhaps he has been all the time a would be persecutor, and given the opportunity would be worse than Laud himself, "because he is so violently busie already, egging and inciting the Parliament, like their evill Genius, to acts of tyranny against a people he knows innocent."<sup>1</sup> To discredit Prynne, Walwyn considers the notorious avarice and corruption of lawyers; why does Prynne still take huge fees instead of working for law reform? Walwyn protests against the censorship of the press, and lays a plank in what was to be the Leveller platform, claiming that the people can only bind Parliament to what they can do themselves, thus excluding persecution for conscience.

This pamphlet also includes some amusing criticism of Prynne's style, which Lilburne was not sufficiently sophisticated to have made. Walwyn laughs at Prynne's elaborate conceits;

...those slight, but arrogant expressions of his said Epistle, telling the honourable Parliament, That he knows not what evill Genius, and Pithagorian Metempsychosis, the Antiparliamentary soules formerly dwelling our defunct Prelats earthy Tabernacles, are transmigrated into and revived into a new generation of men (started up of late amongst us) commonly knowne by the name of Independents: such bumbast inckhorne tearmes, savouring so much of a meer pedanticke, as ill beseemeth his relation to that supream power of Parliament. 2

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.194

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.197



Prynne's prolixity does not escape: "Self denial is too hard a lesson for him...for though he cannot outreason men, yet if he can but out-write his opposers, he claps his wings and crows victoria, that he hath silenced them all. Truly for writing much I verily believe that he out-does any man in England."<sup>1</sup> Walwyn uses the image of disease to describe Prynne's outpourings, as he was to use it against Thomas Edwards. In the exchange Walwyn appears a far more modern figure than either Prynne or Lilburne, his detached ridicule suggesting the urbanity of Andrew Marvell rather than the saint of the Civil War. He and Lilburne were almost mutually exclusive in their approaches; two such men were unlikely to combine, but they had the potential for a powerful partnership. If one also thinks of Overton's gift for satire, at this time (February 1645) about to be unleashed in the Marpriest series, the variety of the Leveller partnership is evident.

Lilburne's forecast that Prynne might provoke Parliament against him proved correct, for in June 1645 he was called before the Parliamentary Committee of Examinations to answer for himself. Eager to make a public issue out of the affair, Lilburne rapidly published his speech to the Committee, under the heading, The Reasons of Lieu.-Col. Lilburnes sending his letter to Mr. Prinn. Lilburne used the moves of authority to repress him to win himself a larger audience,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.201.

making his own personality the test case for the issues he espoused. His speech is in a quiet key, unlike the tract that preceded it, and is brief and to the point. Lilburne recounts his early career and the money, time and blood he has spent in the Parliamentary cause, and then complains of the persecution of the godly by parliamentary committees that require them to swear an ex officio oath, which, like that of the abolished Star Chamber, could only be refused on pain of imprisonment. Press and pulpit, incited by Prynne, (Lilburne argues) have been scaremongering against the Independents and sects. Thanks to the mob violence provoked by Presbyterian preachers, an Independent minister has been shot at in the pulpit. Lilburne vents his distaste for Prynne's "bitter, invective, slanderous language,"<sup>1</sup> and retorts the accusation of raising discord back on his opponent; the supporters of Parliament were united until "such bitter dividing spirits as his kindled a blazing fire of discord and dissension amongst us."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Reasons of Lieu.-Col. Lilburnes sending his letter to Mr. Prinn, (1645), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.7

(iv) Richard Overton - the Marpriest satires<sup>1</sup>

Little is known about Richard Overton apart from his pamphlets.

He had part of his upbringing in Holland where he belonged to a

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<sup>1</sup> The Marpriest tracts were contemporary with Lilburne's and Walwyn's attacks on Prynne, and a year before Walwyn's replies to Thomas Edwards. To clarify the sequence of the three writers' pamphlets, I have listed below those written before September 1646 which I mention.

1638

A Worke of the Beast. Lilburne.

1642

Some Considerations... A discourse concerning the unseasonable difference between the Protestant and the Puritan. Walwyn.

1643

The Power of Love. Walwyn.

1644

Jan. Mans Mortallitie. Overton.

July The Compassionate Samaritane. Walwyn.

1645

Jan. A Copie of a Letter.. to Mr. Prinne. Lilburne.

Feb. A Helpe to the Right Understanding of a Discourse concerning Independency lately published by William Pryn. Walwyn.

April The Araignment of Mr. Persecution. Overton.

May A Sacred Synodical Decretal. Overton.

June The Reasons of Lieu.-Col. Lilburnes sending his Letter to Mr. Prinn. Lilburne.

June Martin's Eccho. Overton.

July The Nativity of Sir John Presbyter. Overton.

July The Copie of a Letter to a Friend. Lilburne.

Sept. England's Miserie and Remedie. Overton?

Oct. England's Birthright Justified. Lilburne.

Oct. England's Lamentable Slaverie. Walwyn.

Dec. The Ordinance for Tythes dismounted. Overton.

1646

Jan. Innocency and Truth Justified. Lilburne.

March A Whisper in the Eare of Mr. Thomas Edwards. Walwyn.

March A Word More to Mr. Edwards. Walwyn.

June The Just Mans Justification. Lilburne.

June The Freemans Freedom Vindicated. Lilburne.

June An Antidote against Master Edwards. Walwyn.

June The Just Man in Bonds. Walwyn.

July A Remonstrance of many Thousand Citizens. Overton.

July An Alarum to the House of Lords. Overton.

Aug. A Prediction of Mr. Edwards his Conversion. Walwyn.

Sept. A Defiance against all Arbitrary Usurpations. Overton.

Baptist congregation, no doubt imbibing his radical learnings there. A printer and ready handler of a secret press, he was immensely valuable to the Levellers. He probably met Lilburne in 1645, the year in which Nicholas Tew, a bookseller handling Lilburne's tracts, admitted some had been printed in his house by one Robert (Richard) Overton.<sup>1</sup> Overton's first pamphlets were quite different from those of Lilburne or Walwyn. In 1644 he published Mans Mortallite, an argument that the soul was mortal as the body, and awaited resurrection at the day of judgement. Overton's version of this anabaptist heresy had rationalistic and materialistic overtones that horrified the Presbyterians. He achieved real notoriety, however, with his Marpriest series of pamphlets against the Westminster Assembly in 1645, when the Presbyterians were at last gaining token successes in their attempt to establish a uniform Presbyterian system.

What separates Overton's tracts from other pleas for complete religious toleration is their tone and form; Overton adopted the name "Yongue Martin Marpreist, son of the old Martin the Metrapolitane".<sup>2</sup> and modelled himself to some extent on his Elizabethan

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<sup>1</sup> H.R. Plomer, "Secret Printing During the Civil War", The Library, Second Series, V, (1904) 377. Robert Overton was indeed an Independent, later one of Cromwell's colonels. Richard Overton seems a far more likely man for the operation of a secret press. This is the opinion of Pauline Gregg, Freeborn John, (London, 1961), p.116. William Haller, Tracts on Liberty, I, 179, agrees.

<sup>2</sup> Titlepage. Tracts on Liberty, III, 205.

predecessor. One of the original Marprelate series, Hay any Worke for Cooper, had been reprinted in 1642, and Overton may well have possessed copies of others. It needs to be emphasised that his imitation is not a close one; Overton uses some of Martin's mannerisms, particularly his half-humorous invective and ironic courtesy, but Overton's sense of comedy is rougher and lacks the polished wit of the original. Overton's sentences are longer and have none of Marprelate's Elizabethan balance, and the structure of the Marpriest tracts is different from Martin's mixture of scandal and argument. Clearly what has attracted Overton is the outright violence, the hostility to clericalism vented in satire and bitter ridicule. With a sure instinct he ignored the fact that the original Marprelate was a Presbyterian to pick up his assault on clerical dignity and prosperity.

The first and most striking of the series is entitled, The Araignment of Mr. Persecution. Presented to the Consideration of the House of Commons, and to all the Common People of England, and was published in April 1645. The dedicatory epistle, addressed to the Westminster Assembly itself, "such a Quagmire of croaking skip-jacke Presbyters",<sup>1</sup> is the part in which Overton imitates Marprelate. It is written in the character of a Presbyterian minister in search of promotion, and is followed by an imitation of an order of the Assembly

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.208.

thanking the author and ordering him to print his treatise, a procedure often followed with sermons. It is worth quoting at length:

Reverend Sirs,

According to my duty at your divine entreaty, I have reduced those pious instructions received from you, into such a pleasing forme, as I hope, shall not only affect, but abundantly edifie the people of this Kingdome under your holy Iurisdiction; for considering your spirituall care over them, and how your tims /sic/ hath been taken up wholly in the procurement of that sacred Ordinance for Tythes, wysely thought on before the Directory, for he is an Infidell and denyeth the faith, that doth not provide for his family: your late humble Advice digested into severall Assertions: your fore travill and paine you have daly ever since your holy Convocation undergon: to bring to birth his Holynesse, Sir ION PRESBYTER: and other your toylesome endeavours for the Honour of your holy cloth, I have therefore more willingly become your Ioyrneman to ease your Burthen in this your toylesome time of Deformation; and having thus prepared my endeavoures, fit for the publike vew, I am emboldned to Dedicate them unto your divine protection, not doubting of the sacred imposition of your hands upon them, to sanctifie them unto the people, as truly Presbyterean, that comeing forth with your Classicall Authority, they may obtaine a reverent estimation with them. And... but a small matter will please MARTIN, if you sanctifie him with the Benedicite of a Cornelian Benefice of 400.l. per annum to knocke downe the Anabaptists, Brownists, & with your thumping, humping, Presbyteriean, Classicall CLUB, that shall suffice pro tempore, and withall to gratifie him with the Deane of Pauls House that's but a small matter, ...: you doe not thinke, neither doth it enter into your hearts, how reverend Yoyngue MARTIN can thunder-thump the Pulpit, O, he can staer most devoutly, raile and bawle most fervently, storme most tempestiously even till he foame at mouth most precisely; Oh how he can spetter't out! O these cursed Anabaptists, these wicked Brownists, these Heretickes, these Scismastickes, these Sectaries; O MARTIN hath it at his fingers end. 1

The pun on 'deformation' and the author's reference to himself as 'his worship' recall Marprelate. The mocking tone is also familiar,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.207.

though Overton's burlesque of the qualities needed by a Presbyterian minister is his own idea. He concentrates on the material rewards of a state Church; tythes would become one of the taxes the Levellers wished to abolish. Religious hypocrisy is one of Overton's principal themes throughout his career as a pamphleteer, and his satire on the Presbyterians makes an interesting contrast with the parallel attacks of Lilburne and Walwyn.

The tract proper is in the form of a trial, where Mr. Persecution is brought before Lord Parliament, assisted by Justices Reason, Humanity and Conformity. God's Vengeance is prosecutor, and the jury have such names as Liberty of Subject, Gospel, Politique Power, and Good Samaritane. The counsel for the defence are Sir Symon Synod and Sir John Presbyter. This allegorical trial influenced Bunyan and draws its vitality partly from the actual trials of the puritans in England. A long list of characters make their charges against Mr. Persecution, among them Mr. Sovereignty of Christ, Mr. Unity of Kingdoms, Mr. Humaine Society, Mr. United Provinces and Mr. Desolate Germany. It is significant that the civil and humane reasons against persecution get more space than the religious ones.

The dialogue is fairly lively and rings true to life, as in the scene when Mr. Persecution objects to his jury. He relies confidently on the privilege due to one of his station, and offers

to impannel a jury, "of worth and quality."<sup>1</sup> Sir Symon Synod has ready a suitable jury, persons of importance in the world and favourers of the cause of the clergy. These are Mr. Satan, Mr. Antichrist, Mr. Spanish Inquisition, Mr. High Commission, Mr. Assembly of Divines, Mr. Ecclesiastical Supremacy, Mr. Scotch Government and Mr. Pontifical Revenue. A comic scene follows when the judges object to the new jury. King's Servant strikes in with: "My Lord there be divers of them whom Royall Prerogative hath called in to his Assistance, and at this day I conceive maketh use of them for Establishing the Liberty of the Subject and the Protestant Religion, so that for my part I cannot see how all of them can be condemned." In horrified tones King's Attorney protests: "My Lord a great part of them are props to the Protestant Religion."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the new jury is rejected.

Many witnesses are called against Persecution, compiling a damning case. He and his counsels object violently to Christian testifying, drawing the conservative's picture of the radical sectary to discredit him. Unlike the regular clergy, Christian is an unsettling social influence:

And for that fellow, that pretends he hath knowne  
me since the comeing of Christ, he is a man of no

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.217.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.218.



reputation, without habitation, a beggerly fellow, a  
runagate, a loose fellow, he stayes in no place, keeps  
no hospitality, blasphemeth that most divine, Liviticall,  
ever to /be/ adored Ordinance for Tythes, and counteth  
it as an unholy thing, paies none where he lives, but  
sharkes here and there, where he can shufle in his head,  
runnes from house to house, to delude simple women, who  
are ever learning and never learned; and where he saith,  
his name is CHRISTIAN, his name is not CHRISTIAN, neither  
is he of the generation of Christianity, but a most fact-  
ious dissembling Anabaptist, a Tubpreacher, and no Chris-  
tian, as Sir Symon, Sir Iohn, and divers other reverend,  
and honourable persons here present can witnesse: 1

Overton successfully combines a vivid portrayal of English Life and social prejudice with his allegorical characters and their arguments. As a final quibble Synod claims Persecution is falsely named, so called when he was seduced by the Papists; his true name is Present Reformation, which is synonymous with Presbyterian Government. When this fails an attempt is made to bribe Justice Conformity to suspend the sentence until the advance of the Scots' "mickle Armie"<sup>2</sup> but this is detected by Justice Reason. Persecution is condemned to return to the clergy of Christendom, and Sir John Presbyter to be bound in the dungeon of jure humano. Overton ends with a postscript which betrays his fear that his irony will be misunderstood; he means no disrespect to Parliament by faking a comic imprimatur,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.235.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.251.

or to the Covenant and the Scotch.<sup>1</sup>

Overton's satiric strokes, unusual in a serious tract of this time, made a remarkable impact. He repeated the history of Marprelate by rapidly moving a secret press about, as he printed successive tracts, pursued by Parliament's officers. A Sacred Synodical Decretal or Hue and Cry, From his superlative Holinesse Sir Symon Synod, for the Apprehension of Reverend Martin Mar-Priest ridicules the Presbyterians' anger: "Oh ye Presbyterian Tith Turkey-cocks, set up your feathers, clap your wings, advance your learned cox-combes, humme, flutter and gobble, gobble, gobble, gobble, against MARTIN, till ye fright him into New-gate, or some other Presbyterian Limbo..."<sup>2</sup> Overton tends to extend his criticism beyond the state Church, showing a radical's contempt for the royal prerogative, and for the oligarchic city government of London.

Martins Eccho (1645) goes further than the first two tracts; here is an odd combination of the graceful touches of Marprelate and Overton's own brutal contempt:

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<sup>1</sup> Overton appears to have incurred much disapproval for his wit, even among his party. In a pamphlet of 1649, The Baiting of the Great Bull of Bashan Unfolded he defended an analogy between the Levellers' attack on Cromwell and a bull baiting. Some of the Levellers had objected to the use of the word 'Pox'. He claimed that he valued both mirth and seriousness in their true places, and ruefully chides his readers: "I had thought with two or three merry Jiggs to attempt an uproar in all the laughters in England, but I see you are a company of dull souls, mirth with you is like a Shoulder of Mutton to a sick Horse". (sig.A2).

<sup>2</sup> A Sacred Synodical Decretal, (1645), p.3.

Hereupon his Holinesse, reverend Young MARTIN, out of sincerity to God, and naturall love unto his distressed Country, most willingly became servant to your superlative Holinesse, to ease your burden in this your toylsome time of Classical Exaltation, of a little State-Ambition, and spiritual Supremacy ... that you might have the more time to stuffe your guts, extend your panches, cram your bellies, farcinate your ventricles, snort out Directories, blurt out Ordinances, grin at Christ, and snerle at his Sectaries, and for his meritorious pious endeavours, MARTIN expected a reward, as very justly he might, but to cloake your covetousnesse and ingratitude, you pick Quarrells against him for some small failings in his Treatise. 1

This tract ends with an address to the common people appealing to their grievances by playing on the themes of their poverty, taxation, the press gangs and the tithes demanded by the clergy. If the King and Parliament put their clergy in the van of their armies instead of the innocent souls now there, they would soon be heard to preach peace. Overton warns the people that they will be no better under Parliament's tyranny than the King's, unless they can secure liberty of the subject and freedom of conscience. The last two tracts are a comic horoscope of Sir John Presbyter, and a fierce attack on the Ordinance for tithes. After this Overton's attention was taken up by Leveller tracts and the troubles they brought him.

Overton's Marpriest pamphlets are far more sophisticated than the early work of Lilburne. Overton showed a broad critical knowledge of the techniques of controversy, a detachment and a gift for satire

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<sup>1</sup> Martins Eccho, p.2

quite foreign to the impetuous Lilburne. He had the ability to use skilfully such literary devices as allegory and parody, and could dramatise his opponents' and his own arguments, putting them into the mouths of allegorical characters. It is significant that whereas Lilburne relied much on acknowledging his tracts and making his own career an important part of them, Overton first achieved notoriety through a persona, which thanks to his literary ability carried more weight than his own name. What Overton could not rival was the completeness with which Lilburne gave himself to his public, the frankness with which he shared his thoughts and feelings with them, and the confidence with which he called on them for action.

### C. The First Leveller Pamphlets

#### (i) Lilburne's first arrest

It was in 1645 that Lilburne, Overton and Walwyn first showed signs of working together. Overton had met Lilburne by the beginning of the year at least, and Lilburne met Walwyn in June 1645, when the latter was at Westminster concerned with charges being brought against William Lenthall, Speaker of the House of Commons. All three were discontented with Parliament, and had joined the attack on the Presbyterians, though none were members of the major Independent congregations in London. Overton and Walwyn had already shown radical ideas in civil politics, and Lilburne was soon to surpass them. In

the following years the three came to concert their efforts to follow a single programme, that of the Leveller party.<sup>1</sup>

Lilburne showed in 1645 how he was to broaden the issues for which he was fighting. On July 19, he eagerly seconded the accusations brought against Lenthall, and was promptly arrested for slandering the speaker. Old animosities were the cause of this unusual arrest, for Prynne and Bastwick, together with his old commander Colonel King, had taken the opportunity to inform against him. In The Copie of a Letter from lieutenant colonell J. Lilburne to a friend (1645), Lilburne rapidly gave the public an account of his examination. In brief, he refused to answer interrogatories, arguing with new legal learning that they infringed Magna Charta and the liberties of the subject. This account was reprinted in Innocency and Truth Justified (January, 1646) and is dealt with in more detail in my discussion of that pamphlet. In the remainder of The Copie of a Letter ... to a friend Lilburne condemns Parliament's justice outright, telling of the neglect of his petitions for arrears of pay, and reparations granted for the Star Chamber sentence. A loyal servant of Parliament, Lilburne has been treated with jeers and contempt in his search for his rights. He compares the Parliamentary committees to the Star Chamber, arguing in detail the illegality of their sentence, calling on Coke's Institutes Part III

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<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes hard, despite their differences of style, to distinguish between some of the shorter pamphlets of Walwyn and Overton, or to tell in whose mind any given idea originated.

and the Parliamentary Book of Declarations to back his case. Both courts have disregarded the normal processes of law, every Englishman's birthright. In a rambling manner Lilburne touches on a wide list of grievances. Parliament makes no provision for the widows and orphans of the soldiers that fight for them; some have to borrow in order to eat. The city government is obligarchic and oppressive, no better than under the King. Lilburne appeals to those who are not satisfied with Parliament's golden promises of freedom, seeing the issue as one between the powerful rich Members and the underprivileged people whom they use, but do nothing for. His bitterness comes out in these words to the sergeant of the House: "O Sir, tell them from me, I say the cry of the Widdow & the Fatherlesse, the poor and needy, the oppressed, and the afflicted, will cry lowd in the ears of the Lord of Hosts against them, and theirs, for judgement and vengeance."<sup>1</sup>

That Lilburne's tactics were already gaining him support can be seen from a petition for his release of August 26, which was signed by two to three thousand hands. Prison gave Lilburne<sup>a</sup> certain status, which he used to advantage. As a living instance of Parliament's injustice he provided a focal point for agitation. According to Prynne, he would sit in Newgate with Coke's Institutes on his knees,

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<sup>1</sup> The Copie of a Letter ... to a friend, (1645) sig. B4<sup>v</sup>

expounding the law to poor folk who came to visit him.<sup>1</sup> Prynne's irritation suggests that Lilburne's legalistic defence of the Englishman's liberties was increasing his popularity. Two pamphlets published in Lilburne's support show that Walwyn and possibly Overton were already behind him in his struggle. The title of Walwyn's pamphlet was Englands Lamentable Slaverie, and Englands Miserie and Remedie was probably the work of Overton.<sup>2</sup> Both censured Parliament for governing in the very arbitrary fashion it ostensibly opposed, and used Lilburne's case as an example. They demanded that Parliament should do more for the people of England, and should give them freedom of conscience and their just rights at law. They stressed that Parliament was a representative body, and suggested that the people should put pressure on it to carry out their wishes, though neither suggested how this should be done.

(ii) Englands Birthright Justified

The publisher's note to Englands Lamentable Slaverie recommended another pamphlet, Englands Birthright Justified. This was almost certainly written by Lilburne; possibly it was smuggled out of prison and published by a friend. In it Lilburne still further

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<sup>1</sup> The Lyar Confounded or A Brief Relation of John Lilburnes miserably-mistated-Case. (1645) p.22

<sup>2</sup> Attributed to Overton by Don.M.Wolfe, Milton in the Puritan Revolution (n.p.1941, reprinted London, 1963) p.480.

extends the demands for reform fast becoming associated with his name. It is anonymous, one of his last signs of caution, and purports to be by, "a Well-wisher to the just cause for which Lieutenant Col. John Lilburne is unjustly imprisoned."<sup>1</sup> The full title reads: Englands Birthright Justified Against all Arbitrary Usurpation, whether Regall or Parliamentary, ... With divers Queries, Observations and Grievances of the People, declaring this Parliaments present Proceedings to be directly contrary to those fundamental Principles, which their Actions first were justifiable against the King.

The pamphlet does not concentrate on Lilburne, but is a rambling catalogue of a multitude of grievances; these are worth listing in detail in order to show the wide appeal it must have had, the speed at which Lilburne's view of politics was developing and the way he set about writing. Lilburne opens with a quotation from the Parliamentary Book of Declarations, making the distinction between the letter and the equity of the law. The argument that when the letter of the law is used to deny the equity, then the law is invalid, is turned from use against the King to point the way for subjects to refuse obedience to Parliament, which is itself subject to the known and declared law. This justifies Lilburne's refusal to answer illegal

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Tracts on Liberty, III, 259.



interrogatories propounded by the Commons; if they wish to change the law they must say so, not quietly break it themselves. Lilburne then repeats that power is only delegated for the good of the entrusters, and runs over the support the Petition of Right and the Act for the Abolition of the Star Chamber gives his assertions.

In a series of queries to lawyers, Lilburne asks whether Parliament is not bound by law; why the accusations against Speaker Lenthall have been blocked; whether interrogatories are lawful; whether the Presbyterians have a monopoly of spiritual truth; why the laws are not written in English; why the Merchant Adventurers still hold a monopoly, when monopolies have been technically abolished; why the Stationers Company do likewise, and are also allowed to break into peoples' houses on the pretence of investigation? In the midst of these pertinent questions a rousing appeal is made to those who hoped for greater things for the common people from the war:

O Englishmen! Where is your freedoms? and what is become of your Liberties and Priviledges that you have been fighting for all this while, to the large expence of your Bloods and Estates, which was hoped would have procured your liberties and freedomes? but rather, as some great ones Order it, ties you faster in bondage and slavery, then before; therefore look about you betimes, before it be to late, and give not occasion to your Children yet unborne to curse you, for making them slaves by your covetousnesse, cowardly basenesse, and faint-heartednesse; therefore up as one man, and in a just and legall way call those to account, that

endeavour to destroy you, and betray your Liberties and Freedomes. 1

After this Lilburne changes tack to castigate the Covenant, particularly for retaining the Popish custom of tithes, which were then a very real hardship to the smaller man who could not influence the parson. The contradictions in the Covenant make up another list of points, attacking the Presbyterians and censuring Parliament for failing to keep many of the promises made in it. For example, malignants have not been sought out - here King and Manchester, Lilburne's personal enemies, are mentioned, besides Bastwick and Lenthall. Lilburne objects to the city government of London, in the hands of the great merchants as much as it was in the King's time. A large section proposes reforms to reduce the oligarchic power of the Mayor and Aldermen, and give a larger share to the democratically elected Common Council. This would have been very popular with the small tradesmen, who were suffering economically from the war, and had been making efforts towards representation in their Livery Companies.

Lilburne goes on to declare Parliament itself is in need of reform. Members should lay aside the offices of profit they enjoy; they are making so much money out of the war that they are in danger of losing contact with those they represent. Parliament should be elected once a year, and constituencies should be able to judge the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.269-270.

performance of their members; they might find their representatives, "Ninneys and Groles".<sup>1</sup> Lilburne gives much advice on elections, quoting from pamphlets on the new elections to complete the House. He is well aware of their democratic value. One of his quotations warns against electing men for their riches alone, for friendship or personal interest, to which Lilburne adds: "But who thinkes upon the poor wise man, who as Solomon saith, saved the City? Who thinks of the just man, whose integrity keeps Gods blessing amongst us, and us together among ourselves? No not one; who wonders then to see a crooked representation of a crooked Commonwealth; it is no true glasse that casts not a shadow as crooked and deformed as the substance."<sup>2</sup> This tract shows strong signs of Lilburne's tendency to identify the elect with the poor people of England. He then quotes a warning against electing lawyers, backing it with argument to prove their love of corruption and arbitrary power and their interest in making money out of the law - he cites Prynne as an example. Following a practice he was to continue, Lilburne recommends Walwyn's A Helpe to the right understanding of a Discourse for a further discussion of lawyers.

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Tracts on Liberty, III, p.291. Lilburne is using a phrase of John Bastwick.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.292.

Lilburne is searching for some means of enlisting public opinion and bringing it to bear on the government. His next section opens by suggesting petitioning, which was to be a major Leveller tactic. Further ideas for improvement are: the reform of the city government by translating the old charters; the reduction of the northern royalists; and the discovery and prevention of financial corruption. This leads him to a bitter attack on the profiteers who rob the Commonwealth in its time of need, reinforced with massive quotations from the Book of Job. With much energy but little order he swings back to denounce lawyers again. Lilburne apologises for a printer's error in missing out some monopolies, which are inserted. Unperturbed by the structural chaos, Lilburne launches into an attack on the heavy indirect taxation that is crushing the small tradesmen, hitting the poor most and the rich least. Finally in a welter of protest and biblical quotation the pamphlet comes to an end.

The faults of Englands Birthright Justified will be obvious from this summary. Even allowing for printer's errors the structure is practically non-existent, as even the lists of points fail to keep Lilburne from ranging from subject to subject as the whim takes him. Yet the virtues of the pamphlet cannot all be given in a summary. Lilburne's expositions of individual grievances are racy, forceful, and frequently very perceptive; he has been thinking to some purpose on the state of the Country. There is a new solidity in

his observations. An extended quotation will show the attraction of the pamphlet; here is a complete passage on the inequality between rich and poor:

But some will say, that our bondage is not yet so bad as that of Aegypt was, for all the Jewes were in great bondage under the Egyptians, and yet many of ours are exempted; unto that I yeeld, and doe confesse, that few of our great and mighty men doe either work the clay, or make the bricks; but they lay either all, or most part of the burthen on the poor by heavy labour, and sweat of their browes in the heat of the day, not only in working the clay, and making of the bricks, but if they doe complaine to Higher Powers, upon their cruell and Tyrannous Task-masters, they are so farre from getting any kind of Justice, that because they moaned and complained, and groaned under such heavy and grievous burdens that they were not able any longer to beare or indure, they are further ordained (even for their complaining) to gather stubble too, because they are so idle.

Innumerable instances there are throughout these three mourning and bleeding Kingdomes, to prove all these businesses, but I will onely chuse a Citie instance, and let every man who is in his profession after that manner grieved and wronged, turne the simile home to himself, according to his smart; Though the poore Hatmakers, who earne their living with heavy and hot labour, both early and late, doe pay Excise both for all the materialls, and fire which they use, for the bread they eate, & for the liquor they drinke, and clothes they weare, yet when they have made their Hatts, and done all they can with great trouble and toyle, day and night, they are forced to pay Excise over againe out of their very labour, notwithstanding it was both deare and heavy in buying all the necessaries before.

O cruell, pitifull, lamentable and intolerable Bondage, no longer to be indured, suffered nor undergone, the burdens being far heavier then the poore labourers can beare: and yet the Spirituell Task-masters doe gape, and roar like Lions for their prey of Tythes also over, above, and besides all, without any kinde of pitie, compassion, or commiseration, in these grievous daies of affliction.

When this Kingdom was in any way or possibility of subsistence, the ancient custome was, that Taxations should be raised by way of Subsidie, which is the most just equitable, and reasonable way of all, for it sets every tub on its owne bottome, it layes the burthen upon the strong shoulders of the rich, who onely are able to beare it, but spareth and freeth the weak shoulders of the poore, because they are scarcely able to subsist, pay rent, and maintain their families.

But our new invented pay, layes the burden heavily upon the poore, and men of middle quality or condition, without all discretion, and scarcely maketh the rich touch it with one of their fingers: yea, many of them are more advanced in thir prosperous estates, through the great ruines, distractions, and miseries of the Kingdome, by their great salleries they have for excecuting their places, as 500l, £500/1000l. 1200l. and more, per annum, besides all the bribes they get, and the false Accounts they make; So that in this life, the rich have their pleasures, but poore Lazarus paies. 1

It can be seen that the long sentence, broken only by colons and semi-colons, though technically clumsy, is no barrier to comprehension. Lilburne uses an analogy from scripture that would be familiar to his readers. With a touch of wry humour he turns the illustration to apply it to the situations of the rich and poor. One may find the lachrymose adjectival rhetoric of the first and third paragraphs repetitious, but the invective is balanced and supported by the admirably plain illustration of the hat makers, which shows Lilburne's eye for factual detail. The remark on tithes is not as irrelevant as it may seem; as I have mentioned, they were

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, pp.302-303

a kind of tax that hit the less affluent very hard, and the demand for their abolition persistently crops up in the literature of the radicals. The analysis of the Excise is lucid and convincing and bears the mark of Lilburne's shrewd grasp of politics. Lilburne's language, apart from the repetition of similar adjectives, is simple and vigorous; the biblical overtones no doubt made a favourable impression on his readers. The passage is strengthened by the colloquial touches such as "sets every tub on its owne bottome" or "touch it with one of their fingers". The terse summing up has a proverbial ring.

There was no risk of the reader failing to understand the object of England's Birthright Justified, and little chance that it would not include something that affected him personally. A voice had been raised for the smaller tradesmen, "the men of middle quality or condition", and the poor, against a multitude of vested interests. The pamphlet's most striking quality is Lilburne's energy, ranging from subject to subject with no loss of pressure, incessantly calling for reform, appealing and threatening. Some pamphleteers, not necessarily literary figures or outstanding prose writers, can convey their individual tone of voice in their writings, holding the reader with its personal quality. Something of Lilburne's magnetism and restless concentration come through in all his pamphlets; what he must have sounded like haranguing his supporters. A remark of Irvin Ehrenpreis on Swift helps to define what I mean:

"What Swift possessed, I think, was a dramatic immediacy, a force of presence, of personality, a voice addressing us particularly ... Swift seems to be talking directly from his own true self to that of each separate reader."<sup>1</sup> Lilburne possessed this quality in an even greater degree than Swift, and it was his greatest asset as a pamphleteer. It mitigates his defects in construction and prevents the reader, as it doubtless did in 1645, from laying down his pamphlets.

(iii) Innocency and Truth Justified

In October 1645 the Commons, unwilling or unable to proceed against Lilburne, released him. Meanwhile, Prynne, who was not a man to take Lilburne's insults lightly, had published two denigrating pamphlets. The first was a general denunciation of the Independents and sectaries, A Fresh Discovery of Some Prodigious New Wandering-Blazing Stars and firebrands, stiling themselves New-Lights, Firing our Church and State into New Combustions ... Divided into Ten Sections, comprising severall most Libellous, Scandalous, Seditious, Insolent, Uncharitable (and some Blasphemous) Passages, published in late Unlicensed Pamphlets. Prynne names

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<sup>1</sup> Swift the Man, his Works and the Age (2 vols. to date; London, 1963-1966) II, 500.



Lilburne as "the Ringleader of this Regiment of New-Firebrands".<sup>1</sup> He devotes some space to his A Copie of a Letter to Mr. Prinne; a passage from it dealing with tithes is stigmatized as "insolent, scurrillous and seditious". Overton (as Marpriest) is of the same kidney, a writer of "libellous, seditious, ungodly Pamphlets", and the Araignment of Mr. Persecution is a "scurrilous, blasphemous, unlicensed Libell".<sup>2</sup> Presumably even Prynne was running out of insulting adjectives.

Prynne's major effort against Lilburne was The Lyar Confounded, or A Brief Relation of John Lilburnes miserably mistated Case. He accuses Lilburne of raising the seeds of mutiny and sedition against the Parliament:

IT is S. James his Observation, c.3.5. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth: And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and is set on fire of hell: which I may truly apply to John Lilburns tongue, and much more to his pen employed only in compiling Libellous Letters and Papers. Behold how great combustions and tumults have they kindled among the Ignorant Vulgar, who adore him as the onely Oracle of Truth, when he is a meere Legend of Lyes... 3

Prynne had reason to be angry, as in his early anti-Independent

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<sup>1</sup> A Fresh Discovery, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp.8 and 10

<sup>3</sup> The Lyar Confounded, (1645) sig.A4

pamphlets his main message had been the traditional one of the necessity of a state Church; and in return he had been portrayed as the worst kind of persecutor. Even so, the wealth of his abuse is amazing.

In defending the legality of Lilburne's imprisonment Prynne is forced to quibble and finally to admit that it was not the methods of the Star Chamber that were illegal, but merely that they were in the hands of the wrong people. Prynne is exasperated by Lilburne's readiness to continue publishing while in jail, his refusal to submit to the mild authority of Parliament. He claims Lilburn has an organisation to distribute his pamphlets, and acknowledges their popularity. They have made him, Prynne, and his fellow martyr Bastwick, once the heroes of the London populace, thoroughly discredited among the vulgar. Discounting Prynne's exaggeration, it would seem that the clash of personalities initiated by Lilburne had not turned out to the advantage of the more famous man.

Prynne ends in a typical crescendo of hate:

First, earnestly to desire the Honorable Houses of Parliament, and the whole Kingdom to take notice of the Lying, Libelling, Railing, False, Dishonest, Perverse, Uncharitable, Vnchristian disposition of Anabaptists and Separatists, who make no conscience of Forging, Reporting, Publishing and Printing the most False, Impudent, Notorious Scandalous Lyes and Forgeries that can be, both of the Houses of Parliament, their Covenant, Members, and most innocent, pious, blamelesse persons living that are not of their Faction, or opposites unto it, without the least shadow of proof or truth, in which Infernall, Diabolicall, black Art, many of them outstrip

the very Devil himself, and John Lilburn all his followers... <sup>1</sup>

After this it is surprising to find Prynne entreating Lilburne to take this pamphlet as the friendliest Christian office that he can do for his reform. Prynne intends to have his cake and eat it; without a shadow of humour he calls on Lilburne to bless God and himself for his good fortune.

Lilburne chose not to accept this good advice. An attack from Prynne offered him a larger audience and was too serious to ignore. He replied with Innocency and Truth Justified a long pamphlet of 76 pages, which marks the full development of his distinctive manner of writing. For this reason it is the last of this early series of tracts that I will discuss in detail. For later years I shall select more and follow less of the whole sequence of tracts. Innocency and Truth Justified combines the personal narrative of the early tracts with the political observation of England's Birthright, in a highly individual manner. In the first person Lilburne can use his personality, giving the reader a dramatic narrative to engage his sympathy and interest, without losing his grip on the larger issues. This needed egoism equal to Prynne's but by identifying himself with the grievances of a large section of the community, and deliberately making his own case a test for theirs, Lilburne escaped being narrowly personal. I shall have to summarise

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.46.

in detail to describe his achievement.

He opens by reflecting on the afflictions of Christ, as in A Worke of the Beast, making an analogy with his own position. He then draws the reader's attention to his account of his conversion, written at the time of his whipping, which he has appended to the main pamphlet in order to refute the picture painted by Prynne, and reaffirm his place among the elect. William Haller has explained how Lilburne, never ceasing to regard himself as one of the saints, came to equate the law of grace vouchsafed to the elect with the natural law in the hearts of the people, and also with the common law of England.<sup>1</sup> Thus he harmonised his religious and political aims, tending to identify the elect with the poor people of England and to claim for them democratic rights and liberty of conscience together. This combination of ideas was very happy in Lilburne's appeal to public opinion, associating traditional religious themes with a call for extensive reform in the state.

Lilburne treats Prynne with care, refusing to be drawn by his vehemence into replying in kind:

I confess I take small delight with meddling with such a man as William Prinn is, who takes so much elbow roome to tell untruths, without consideration what he saith, as if he had been bread thereunto, and as if there were no God in Heaven to judge righteously or man left upon earth that had so much honestie in him, as to take notice what he saith, were it not that I

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<sup>1</sup> Liberty and Reformation, pp.272-274.

were extraordinarily forced by the violence of him and his partakers, many of which have but little knowledge, & as little Judgement to judge of things between us... 1

Taking a small passage from A Fresh Discovery, dealing with a meeting in the Windmill Tavern over a petition of the anti-Presbyterians, Lilburne meticulously exposes thirteen or fourteen untruths in eight lines, and refused to meet his opponent further on the ground of detailed reply. This was a wise policy, as few things are so detrimental to the pamphleteer as point by point refutation.

Moving to The Lyar Confounded Lilburne shows his confidence in his ability to carry his readers with him. He proposes to give an account of his life to refute Prynne and his fellow slanderer Bastwick, who had recently published A Just Defence of John Bastwick (1645). Lilburne mentions his schooling, his honourable apprenticeship, domestic details that many a London citizen would recognise as similar to his own. Then he jumps to his arrest in 1645 and reasserts the points of illegality that Prynne had not answered, competently summarising his arguments on arbitrary arrest and interrogatories from Magna Charta and the Petition of Right. He recounts in full his examination by the committee which I have mentioned earlier.<sup>2</sup> Lilburne defiantly stood on his rights as a free man not to answer

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<sup>1</sup> Innocency and Truth Justified, p.4

<sup>2</sup> See p.

interrogatories unless a specific charge was brought, and read a statute of Henry III to prove his right.

The following passage shows his ability to bring such a scene to life for the reader. Miles Corbet, the chairman, speaks first:

Mr. Lilburn be advised in your expressions and take heed what you say in this nature, Gentlemen, I humblie thank you for your causion given me, but for your advice I desire you to keep it to your selves (for I conceive I know well enough what I say), and truly that rough and hard dealing that I find from the Parliament, and their Officers, forceth me to expresse myself as I doe; for I beseech you give me leave to tell you, that I was never so affronted and abused in all my life amongst my friends as I was by your Serjant at Armes, when he apprehended me, who at the going into the Hall, tooke me by my sword belt, and dragged and pulled and shooke me, giving me such language, as if I had been the arrantest Rogue or Rascall in the world, and when I was out of the Hall, where I civilly (understanding the nature of a Prisooner) disarmed my selfe, and was giving my sword unto the hands of my friend, to carry home to my wife, as my owne proper goods, he would needs by force and violence rob me of it, saying it was his and he would have it, so that I was forced to scuffle to preserve my selfe from being robbed of my owne proper goods, and all this he did unto me, having no Warrent at all about him, to meddle with me, nor I not offering the least affront in the world to him. l

The officiousness of men in small positions of authority is feelingly portrayed in Lilburne's frank voicing of his injured dignity. He had to thank his ready tongue and retentive memory for such an effective little piece. The incident may seem trivial, but it was

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.14. The brackets round, (for I conceive I know well enough what I say), are my own. In the original there is one bracket only, between 'for' and 'I'.

just Lilburne's object to secure better treatment of the common man from his representative. Parliament's contempt for the feelings of its tried servants was an instance of its major flaw. Many citizens, at the mercy of petty officials, would see in Lilburne's case a mirror of their own. Lilburne reflects bitterly on that other occasion when in the early years of the Long Parliament, he had helped defend the members against the brawling royalist Captain Hide. The sergeant was then notably reluctant to arrest the royalist, giving him back his sword and letting him escape. It is worth mentioning that throughout the relation of this incident, and indeed the whole pamphlet, Lilburne's tone is well under control - unlike Prynne's - even when he expresses indignation at a specific instance of injustice, as in the quotation above.

Lilburne takes up the story at his next examination, the direct result of having published the account of his first (The Copie of a Letter ... to a friend). On further questioning he demands the Committee prove the letter is according to law. Recommitted to Newgate after a tiring scene Lilburne's energy is apparent in his request to see his warrant: "I will not abate you, nor the greatest man in England the breadth of one haire, of what I know to be my privilege,..."<sup>1</sup> This narrative is nominally intended to refute Prynne, but it moves under its own momentum without reference to him,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.16.



and effectively switches the reader's interest from Prynne's charges to Lilburne's plight and all it stands for, thus avoiding the clogging method of point by point refutation. Having changed the emphasis to his own ground Lilburne returns to Prynne on page 17, aiming to prove the lawyer a compulsive liar once his prestige is engaged. Rapidly he refutes one after another of Prynne's assertions by factual evidence - for instance Prynne has said that being in the custody of a messenger is not prison; Lilburne retorts with legal references to show it is. In denying Prynne's charge that he has exaggerated the financial losses caused by his imprisonment by the Royalists at Oxford, Lilburne takes the opportunity of demonstrating how the war has ruined his trade and with it that of many others. Another accusation leads to an exciting account of how Lilburne took Tickell castle against the orders of Manchester, his general. Apart from the inherent interest of this defence of Lilburne's successful military career, it introduces the grievance shared by many soldiers, including Cromwell, that the Parliamentary generals were reluctant to give the Royalists a decisive defeat for political reasons. Dismissing Prynne's account of him and his cause, Lilburne derisively comments: "... he fights with his owne shadow, and with a fiction of his owne braine."<sup>1</sup>

At this point Lilburne prints two documents. The first, addressed

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.26.



to the Lord Mayor, disavows responsibility for a tract forged in his name, advocating armed rebellion. This is an invention of his enemies. The second document is the petition of August 26, 1645, asking for his release, which testifies to a considerable body of support. He continues the narrative of his imprisonment; legally he was due for trial at the Newgate sessions, but the Commons had laid no charge. Lilburne quotes a speech he made at an audience with the judges, asking to be tried, and either punished or acquitted; even Parliament had no right to keep a man in prison without trial. The Recorder promised to inform the House of Commons of his case. Lilburne continues: "... and as I withdrew, I could perceive divers people (which to me were strangers) to be much affected with my condition, and bad the Lord blesse me for I was an honest man, and stood for their liberties."<sup>1</sup> He has no difficulty in evoking a similar reaction in his readers. His complete discharge soon followed.

Having dealt triumphantly with his imprisonment, Lilburne moves back yet again to Prynne, openly contemptuous of his accusation that Lilburne plans to lead a popular rebellion. Where are Prynne's witnesses? Changing his tactics he takes up Walwyn's point: why does not Prynne help reform the laws to make them plain and easy to understand? Lilburne remarks on the similarity between the Committee of Examinations and the Star Chamber, and warns that he expects

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.33.

reparations under the Act for the Abolition of the Star Chamber. This leads him to consider the Commons Committees in general, arguing that their powers ought not to be outside the law. Any government must be established upon the principles of right reason, common and universal justice, equity and conscience. Lilburne denies that he wants to ruin Parliament; he stands for the liberty of his country under a just Parliamentary authority.

Here Lilburne takes up his life story again, to correct Prynne's account of his conduct in the years before 1645. We hear in brief of his persecution under Laud, his earlier army career, including the fine stand made by two regiments under his command at Brentford, which prevented Charles seizing the Parliamentary artillery train. His troubles with King and Manchester follow, when he denies Prynne's unfounded story that he was cashiered from the army. Upon leaving the army Lilburne had tried to enter the cloth trade, but found his way blocked by the Merchant Adventurers; his life story plays on the same grievances as Englands Birthright Justified. The subject of the Merchant Adventurers is expanded to cover the whole subject of tyranny, examined from the viewpoint of Pym's speech on Strafford's impeachment, moving away completely from Lilburne's life story. This becomes an impersonal and powerful indictment of taking away men's rights and freedoms, and a demand for equal, universal justice. The section concludes by returning to the specific abuse of monopolies and demands their abolition: "The Parliament hath declared in most of their

Declarations, that all their intentions and designes are and shall be for the maintaining the lawes and liberties of England, and for making the people more free and happy: but not lesse free and more miserable."<sup>1</sup> The monopolists who had mostly been neutral in the war, should pay up the illegal taxes they had levied, and the proceeds should go to pay the arrears of the poor soldiers. Here, again, is the appeal to the small tradesmen, resentful of the monopolies of the great merchants who were able to ride out or even profit from the war.

The next few pages contain concentrated political theory, providing the basis for Lilburne's reforms. Lilburne quotes from Henry Parker's Observations upon His Majesties Late Answers and Expresses (1642), that " the fountaine and efficient cause [of power] is in the people".<sup>2</sup> Power is merely secondary and derivative in princes, to which Lilburne adds his own comment, "and say I in counsell Likewise."<sup>3</sup> Lilburne uses the simple but effective device of taking the Parliamentary spokesman's justification of war against the King and turning it to claim that the people need not only speak through their representative, but may if necessary depose and replace even Parliament. All authority is contractual, and neither Kings nor Parliament have any right to infringe the people's liberties. This

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.57.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.57.

concept of the people, whom Lilburne put himself forward as representing, provides a justification for his struggle and for the party he was to create. He saw himself as giving the people the opportunity to win the share of political power that was rightfully theirs. This was why the press was so important for the Levellers, for it was the only way in which they could hope to turn their theory of democracy into reality, and mobilise sufficient articulate public opinion to put pressure on a government.

With a casual "And after I was robbed of my trade", Lilburne resumes his much interrupted narrative to tell of his difficulties in getting either reparations for the Star Chamber sentence, or his arrears of pay. A letter to Cromwell is printed, which draws attention to the plight of those soldiers who have served Parliament and are now neglected. The appeal to the soldiers was to become increasingly important as Leveller opinions found favour in the ranks of the New Model army. Lilburne prints two petitions, his present one for reparations and his old one from the Fleet against the Star Chamber. His implication is obvious; this is a dramatic test which Parliament must face, and the yardstick will be their treatment of a free Englishman. Lilburne tells of his unhappy treatment by the Committee of Accounts, with Prynne in the chair, where he refused yet another oath, which members and Peers did not have to take. He bitterly complains of the lack of money to pay the soldiers; he has spent his own paying his men. The cash has been provided, but has not reached the armies.

Either, Lilburne remarks sardonically, "it is either in those mens pockets that have no right to it, or else it is sunke into the ground."<sup>1</sup> Lilburne quotes from The Prince the advice to deceive men into thinking the prince is just. So Parliament dangles his money before his eyes but does not actually give it to him. Referring to his Star Chamber reparations, long since voted to him, he anticipates the obvious charge!

But it may be you will say the House of Commons is not at leasure by reason of the publique, I answer, lesse than an hours time will serve my turn in this particular, and it is very strange in 5. years space so much time cannot be found from the publique to transmit my busines, so particularly taken notice of in their first declaration to the Kingdom, sure I am they can find time enough to settle great and rich places upon some of themselves, and to enjoy them, for all their own Ordinance to the contrary, yea and I know some of them that at this day hath plurality of places, and I say the thing I desire of them is more justly my due, then any of their great places are theirs, and therefore I hope they have no true cause to be angry with me for craving iustice at their hands, being it was the end wherefore they were chosen and trusted, and that which they have sworn to do. 2

Lilburne ends the pamphlet, typically, with an apology that he cannot include in it a comparison of the similar ways in which Charles and the Parliament have obstructed justice, and asks for faults to be attributed to the necessity of avoiding censorship.

Innocency and Truth Justified is Lilburne's most satisfactory

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.70.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.75.

pamphlet to date. Its structure, though wayward and opportunist, is held together by the life story of Lilburne in his fight for England's liberties and freedoms. Much of his story, which it was important his followers should know, has an entertainment value apart from the many important questions of the time that it brings into the pamphlet. At least partly because of his loose organisation and readiness to indulge in digression, Lilburne effectively answers Prynne, pointing out, by the way, the lawyer's tendency to over heat and exaggerate once under the spell of his own argument. The tone of the saint is still present, but no longer dominant, replaced by the quieter voice of rational argument and simple exposition of facts. Lilburne's distinctive tone of voice can be heard throughout, mitigating the lack of formal order and giving a kind of unity to the pamphlet. With Innocency and Truth Justified Lilburne had come of age as a pamphleteer. His talents were soon to win him a party to which he could address himself.

D. Walwyn and Thomas Edwards, 1646

In the spring and summer of 1646 Walwyn wrote his most outspoken series of tracts against the Presbyterians, casting off his anonymity in the process. What drew this reaction from him was the publication in 1646 of Gangraena by Thomas Edwards, a Presbyterian minister. Edwards chose the method of personal defamation to discredit the Independent and sectarian opposition to the Presbyterian system.



William Haller's description of his work cannot be bettered:

Edwards did not sit in his study dredging for texts with which to smite the heretics. He made it his business to read, if with starting eyes, the flood of heretical and seditious literature as it poured from the press. From this, from his own observation, from the acquaintances and correspondents, he collected nearly three hundred dangerous opinions of the time, and heaped about them a prodigious assortment of distorted and libellous information concerning those who espoused them. All this he issued in the three amorphous parts, over six hundred pages in all, of his Gangraena: Or a Catalogue and Discovery of many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies, and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of this time ... He sacrificed every canon of logic, of good taste, and, as John Goodwin pointed out, even of syntax, in the effort to make his readers realise what was happening about them. He mentioned names, dates and places... 1

The Independents were not slow to reply to Edwards, among them Walwyn who signed his name to his pamphlet, A Whisper in the Eare of Mr. Thomas Edwards (1646).

Walwyn opens with a severe but cool rebuke; he fears that the motive for Edward's uncharitable attack on his fellow Christians is merely Machiavellian self interest. Edwards is over-fond of the status, power and wealth of the clergy, of their tithes and their right to persecute to preserve their monopoly of religion. He and the Presbyterians are taking the same road to disaster as those other politic men, the prelates. Though this charge is the same as that of Overton in The Araignment of Mr. Persecution, and Lilburne in

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Tracts on Liberty, I, 80.

A Worke of the Beast Walwyn writes not as satirist or saint, but as an impartial observer concerned to analyse Edwards's attitude rationally.

This impression is aided by the positive message of the tract, which Walwyn opposes to the spirit of persecution. Here, in admirably controlled prose, is Walwyn's own declaration of his purpose in writing:

And this your case with me, for I am confident and well assured, that amongst all those whom in this your frantick booke you have named, there is not one that opposed your waies more out of love, and seriously for your own good then I have done: for what ever you through want of experimentall knowledge of me, or upon mis-report may judge of me, I am one that do truly and heartily love all mankind, it being the unfeigned desire of my soul, that all men might be saved, and come to the knowledge of truth, it is my extream grief that any man is afflicted, molested, or punished, and cannot but most earnestly wish, that all occasion were taken away: there is no man weake, but I would strengthen; nor ignorant, but I would informe ... I never proposed any man for my enemy, but injustice, oppression, innovation, arbitrary power and cruelty, where ever I found them I ever opposed myself against them; but so, as to destroy the evil, but to preserve the person; and therefore all the war I have made ... hath been to get victory on the understandings of men; accompting it a more worthy and profitable labour to beget friends to the cause I loved, rather than to molest mens persons, or confiscate estates. 1

Walwyn's protestations are not gainsaid by the rest of the pamphlet, which contains no personal animosity; this contrasts strongly with

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Tracts on Liberty, III, 322-3.



Prynne's assertions of his good will towards Lilburne.

In the latter part of the pamphlet Walwyn tentatively hints at another explanation than self interest for Edwards's violence. With delicate touches he describes the mentality of a person who is convinced that his own prejudices are the word of God, and all who oppose him are "a viperous brood, enemies to the state, subverters of all order and government, and by all means to be extirpated".<sup>1</sup> There is something suspicious in Edwards's passion for uniformity. Walwyn contrasts the spirit of Christian love with the ungodly hate that animates the persecutor; their method of defamation will rebound to the discredit of the Presbyterians. In an ironic description of a reformed Edwards, Walwyn stresses the virtues of peace and reconciliation, allowing Christians of different persuasions to join in good works. After vindicating himself from some of Edwards's personal imputations, Walwyn ends by offering him a petition for toleration, advising him to promote it as a sign of repentance.

The light irony and non-partisan openness of mind of A Whisper in the Eare of Mr. Thomas Edwards were not likely to be entirely appreciated at a time when certainty of divine inspiration was common and to voice a sectional interest was a sure way to an audience. Walwyn's allies in the struggle for toleration, the London Independents, distrusted him already and were later to turn on him, but at this time

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.327.

he was accepted as a prominent spokesman for the Independent and sectarian congregations. He followed his opening with a short tract, A Worde More to Mr. Thomas Edwards (March 1646), giving his view of the covenant, still "earnestly desirous of your reformation, and eternall happinesse."<sup>1</sup>

His next major tract against Edwards followed the second part of Gangraena, and was published in June 1646. In it Walwyn presents a rather different picture of his opponent, recognising that a peculiar psychological condition is at the root of his violence. Here is a charming description of the emotional stake Edwards has in possessing power:

Though God hath given unto Mr. Edwards, parts and abilities, wherewithal to acquire a comfortable life, in a just and good way, and wherein hee might bee helpfull unto many, and hurtfull unto none; neverthelesse hee seemeth unhappily to have placed his contentment in being a Master and Comptrouler of other mens judgements and practises in the worship of God, (wherein the Word of God and a mans owne conscience is only to governe): and thereupon (neccisarily) finding opposition from all consciensious people, hee grows most passionately impatient, and even violently madd against all such as either plead their cause, or take their part; plainly manifesting, throughout the whole course of his preaching and writing, that he would esteem it his greatest felicity, if he could prevaile with authority, or provoke any others to the perpetuall molestation and destruction, of all that will not (though against their consciences) submit to those rules which he approveth. 2

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<sup>1</sup> A Worde More to Mr. Thomas Edwards (1646), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> An Antidote Against Master Edwards, Sig. A2-A2<sup>v</sup>

Walwyn then describes the methods used to compile Gangraena in an imagined dialogue between Edwards and Machiavelli. He exposes the human pettiness and malice inherent in Edwards's system of dependence on godly spies and informers, devaluing the scandalous stories themselves. "Machiavel" advises Edwards to seek out the fiery opponents of what the Presbyterians assume to be error and heresy, and to urge them to collect any scandalous tales circulating about prominent advocates of liberty of conscience, or any error they are supposed to have voiced. Edwards is to encourage them with lamentations on the increase of error, and make leading suggestions of the sort of material he intends to publish to bring his opponents into disrepute. Walwyn shows how in this process there will be a large element of exaggeration from both the informers and Edwards. If one is prepared to utilise peoples' readiness to backbite under cover of secrecy, and gossip maliciously about their acquaintance, it is easy to collect even such a huge list as Edwards has.

#### A Prediction of Mr. Edwards his Conversion and Recantation

(August 1646) continued the series, opening with the suggestion that as Edwards is at his worst, preparing a third part, he is therefore nearest recovery. Walwyn is surprised at his opponent's irrational horror at differences of opinion in religion: "He cannot be ignorant, how disputable all the parts of Divinity are amongst the most learned, how then can he judge it so horrible a thing as he seemes to doe, for

men to differ, though upon the highest points."<sup>1</sup> Considering the supposition that Edwards is near conversion Walwyn imagines the recantation he might make. The recantation is a magnificent portrait of the old and new Edwards, the carnal and worldly persecutor set against the loving Christian. Edwards condemns his previous course of life; though profit has played a part in his fall, his main error has been the presumptuous delusion that he knew the will of God, which has made him bitterly hate those who disagreed with him, so that he urged their persecution. His pride has made him love only superstitious and ignorant people who are prepared to accept his word as that of God, and whom he could mould to his purposes. To harm his enemies he has countenanced treachery, inhumanity and breach of hospitality in his informers. In order to appear singular he has affected black cloths<sup>e</sup>, a large hat and a sad and solemn manner of discourse. He has despised the efforts of common men to preach and sought to make religion a clergy monopoly. Here Walwyn draws some lines of the conventional portrait of the puritan that we have seen forming in the work of Thomas Nashe. The recantation ends on a positive note, with a moving confession from Edwards of the power of love in making him a new man. It was an unusual controversialist who would give such an ecstatic speech, even in irony, to his <sup>p</sup>onent:

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Tracts on Liberty, III, 341



I will redeem the time I have mispent: love will help me, for God is love, the love of Christ will constraîne me, through love I shall be enabled to doe all things, should I not love him that hath loved me, and shewed mercy to me, for so many thousand sinnes, shall not his kindnesse beget kindnesse in me, yes love hath filled me with love, so let me eate, and so let me drinke, for ever, love is good and seeketh the good of all men, it helpeth and hurteth not, it blesseth, it teacheth, it feedeth, it clotheth, it delivereth the captive, & setteth the oppressed free, it breakes not the brused reed, nor quencheth the smokeing flax, farewell for ever all old things as pride, envy, couvetousnesse reviling and the like, and welcome love that maketh all things new, even so let love possesse me, let love dwell in me, and me in love, and when I have finished my dayes in peace, and my yeares in rest I shall rest in peace, and I shall dwell with love, that have dwelt in love. 1

In October 1646, immediately before the publication of the third part of Gangraena Walwyn made his last effort to discredit Edwards. It took the form of a humorous allegory, A Parable, or Consultation of Physitians upon Master Edwards. Doctors Love, Patience, Justice and Truth advise their patient to reform, but are treated with coolness:

Mr. Edwards: Gentlemen, as desperately violent as you judge my distemper; I have not yet lost the use of my senses, I know you all: and have heard Mr. Loves wise exordium: I have known him as long as he has known me, but I was never yet so simple, as to think him wise enough to counsell me, in case I had needed any; nor doe I know by what strange meanes he or any of you (of his politique tribe) thus thrust yourselves upon my privacy. 2

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.348.

<sup>2</sup> A Parable, p.1.

Walwyn derives some comedy from the convention of Edwards repelling his allegorical counsellors, which he does in lively dialogue:

"...as for you friend Piety, you and I have had no great familiaritie, that you should presume to be thus officious, and indiscreetly troublesome!"<sup>1</sup>

Superstition supports Edwards's claim to be in good health, and Policy attempts to second him, but is turned out by the doctors. While their patient goes into a trance, they diagnose his case as a fistula on the brain which vents itself once a month in Gangraena. Still in the trance Edwards imagines his godly spies reporting scandal to him; he asks anxiously if any among the sects is addicted to drunkenness, whoredom or thievery. Then as he sleeps he foams at the mouth black froth. A doctor comments, "But were he in his wonted strength, with this most filthy Gangrenous matter, could he mix his inke, and whilst it were even hot, and boyling, fall to writing as he hath done lately, some huge volume; with which he poysons the spirits of thousands (otherwise) well minded people; and fills them with a violent, masterfull dispositon, with which they goe up and downe, vexing and molesting all they meet."<sup>2</sup> The doctors lance his head to remove the fistula, which done Edwards makes an encouraging recovery, waking and preaching a sermon on love.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.9.

Walwyn handles this, his only excursion into allegory, in a light and unforced manner, creating a domestic scene much of which might have been seen in many London households. Though not so important as its predecessors, the pamphlet shows Walwyn preferring the psychological view of Edwards's actions; he is diseased in his mind, needing consideration and cure, rather than being a politic villain. This with Walwyn's lack of personal rancour for the attacks made on him, gives the positive message of the series of tracts more power than might have been expected. Throughout the series Walwyn displays a balance and impartiality unparalleled among the defenders of toleration, and his prose style is easy and lucid, an admirable vehicle for a rational approach to religious differences.

#### E. The clash with the Lords, 1646

##### (i) Lilburne's second imprisonment

While Walwyn had replied to Edwards, Lilburne had become involved in a clash with the House of Lords that gave him material for the next formative phase of his pamphleteering. From this time can also be dated the growth of a Leveller party as distinct from the Independents; Lilburne was its acknowledged leader, and Walwyn perhaps its most important organiser. In the summer of 1646 Lilburne was engaged in a complicated legal wrangle with his ex-commander Colonel King, a continuation of disagreements of army days. During the case Lilburne unwisely published The Just Mans Justification, (1646) which

extended his accusation of treachery to the Earl of Manchester. Manchester had Lilburne called before the Lords and subsequently imprisoned on June 10, 1646; it was no light matter to make an enemy of a Lord, who had many extra-judicial ways of discomfiting a commoner. On June 18,<sup>1</sup> Lilburne published from prison The Freemans Freedome Vindicated, A true Relation of the cause and manner of Lieut. Col. John Lilburne's present imprisonment in Newgate.

The Freemans Freedome Vindicated is a mere twelve pages long; in it Lilburne's narrative technique is more controlled and economical than before. The pamphlet opens almost like a serial story with Lilburne's views on King's case against him; he confidently assumes that he will be known to readers and that they will have read The Just Mans Justification, he prints the Lords' summons for him to appear at their bar, and opens his narrative. When an officer arrived for him, Lilburne, prepared to make an issue of the matter, made it clear to him that he would go to the Lords out of courtesy alone, not because they had any right to summon him. He represents himself as one of the elect, "I tooke my journey towards Westminster, and in the streets meditating, desired God according to his wonted manner to direct me."<sup>2</sup> On arrival Lilburne sought out a Lord of his acquaintance and made clear to him that he felt compelled to defy the Lords and reject their power of judging commoners, if they intended to

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<sup>1</sup>Lilburne's date on postscript (Thomason's date June 16)

<sup>2</sup>The Freemans Freedom Vindicated, p.3.



press the question of whether he was the author of The Just Mans Justification. Concerned to avoid the imputation of being a trouble-maker, Lilburne makes much of his offer to tell them what they want to know if they avoid a direct clash. This being ineffective, when asked at the Lord's bar if he was the author of The Just Mans Justification Lilburne refused to answer and presented a written plea which argued that the Lords have no jurisdiction over commoners. The plea is quoted, giving his defiance to the Lords; "But to be robbed of my life, or to be made a slave to any whomsoever, either by a voluntary giving up, or in silent suffering to be taken from me, my native, naturall, just, legall and hereditary freedoms and liberties, I am resolved, rather to undergo all extremities, hazards, miseries, and deaths, which possible the wit of man can devise, or his power and tirany inflict."<sup>1</sup>

The following quotation shows how simply Lilburne is content to tell his story, and how well he recreates the scene. He has just presented his plea, and has been further pressed to answer the Lords' questions:

And with this I gave my paper to Master Smith their Cleark then at their Barre: Whereupon the Earle of Lincolne stept up and said to the Speaker, my Lord what have wee to doe with his paper? command him to answer to the question.

Lieutenant Colonell Lilburne (saith the Earle of Manchester) the Lords command you to answer positively to the question, unto which I replied my

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.5.

Lord, in that paper in Master Smiths hand is my answer to the question, and to all others whatsoever you ask me, and no other answer I have to give you, neither shall I, and if that will satisfy you well and good, if not, seeke it where you can have it, for I for my part shall give you no other, where upon I was commanded to withdraw.

And one of the Lords commanded the Cleark to give me my paper, (for saith he, what shall wee doe with it) but I refused to take it, and tould them, I would not medle nor make with it, there it was, and it was enough to me, that I had delivered it at their open Barre, do what you will with it, for my Lords, I am as carelesse as you are, whether you will read it or no, so the clerk threw it after me, but I would not medle with it, but withdrew... 1

James Sutherland considers that the ability to tell a story efficiently is a late arrival in English prose, and notes that the journalism of the Civil War played a part in the development of narrative skill.<sup>2</sup> Though Lilburne's character was the principal reason for his excellent story-telling, some weight should be given to the generally simpler prose coming from men uneducated in rhetoric, and to the puritan tradition of direct statement as opposed to verbal ornament. The ability to recreate the scenes he acted out, and to persuade his reader to identify himself with him, made Lilburne an innovator in political journalism, one of the first to "personalise" political issues. His technique in this pamphlet is to clothe his objections to the Lords in the flesh and blood of his own story.

In a postscript Lilburne voices for the first time a basic creed

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.4-5.

<sup>2</sup> James Sutherland, On English Prose, (Toronto 1957), p.58-64.

of government. God created men equal in power, dignity, authority and majesty . Thus men can only exercise power justly by mutual agreement, for the good of all. It is irrational for the people to part with so much of their power that the recipients can use it to destroy them. It is devilish for any, lay or clergy, to assume a power that has not been given to them by free consent, as in doing so they try to appropriate what belongs to God alone. The application to the Lords is too obvious to need stating.

Lilburne fills up the last pages of his sheet from the Parliamentary Book of Declarations, quoting resolutions against the King for betraying his trust, aimed now at the Commons. In this he shows a typical preference for content over form. This pamphlet's twelve pages contain an impressive combination of principle, narrative and political theory. The excellent timing of the attack on the Lords was hardly due to Lilburne, but he could justly claim to be extremely sensitive to his audience, among the London trading classes, and, by now, the Model army. The temper of these potential Levellers was becoming steadily more radical and egalitarian, and for them the Lords, hardly less influential than the Commons, enjoying so many privileges, were a major object of hostility. Such men would warm towards Lilburne for his contemptuous treatment of England's hereditary rulers.

Two pamphlets gave Lilburne immediate and unqualified support.



A Pearle in a Dounghill was probably written by Overton,<sup>1</sup> who is concerned to expand Lilburne's hint to the Commons that they too may be supplanted. Overton takes a brief look at Lilburne's career and gives his explanation of his frequent collisions with authority: "If you shall consider how this Pearle comes to be cast upon this Dounghill, you will find, the faithfulness of his heart towards God and all good People, and the freeness of his tongue against all kinde of injustice of unworthinesse, in whomsoever, is the only cause and no other."<sup>2</sup> Overton joins Lilburne's imprisonment with Parliament's harshness in restricting liberty of conscience, and censoring the press. In a bitter attack on the Lords' luxury, idleness and inefficiency he brings in many abuses not particular to them, such as monopolies, and warns the Parliament that they risk incurring the people's hatred by their countenance of oppression.

Walwyn, the author of the second pamphlet, The Just Man in Bonds, stresses that Lilburne's case is that of every commoner; he is a deliberate champion of his countrymen and "...hath broke the Ice for us all."<sup>3</sup> He calls for action from the people, who if they do nothing for Lilburne may soon find themselves in the same predicament. Walwyn counts the Commons responsible for not checking the Lords, and

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed by Gregg (Freeborn John, p.406) and Wolfe (Milton p.480) to Overton, but by Frank (The Levellers, p.79) to Walwyn.

<sup>2</sup> A Pearle in a Dunghill, (1646), p.2.

<sup>3</sup> The Just Man in Bonds, (1646), p.1. (A)

is uncharacteristically sharp in his condemnation of them:

If yee did intend to expose this Kingdome to the miseries of warre for no other ends but that one kind of Arbitrary government, Star-chamber, or High Commission Power, might be abollished, and others of these kinds established over us, why would yee not tell us in due time, that wee might have both spared both our lives and our estates, and not made so many souldiers, Widowes and fatherlesse to mourne at the Parliaments gates, for the manyfold wants occasioned by your service, and made us sooner like humble vassals, to present ourselves like salves upon our knees at the House of Lords Barre, and suffer our ears to be bored through with an aule, in testimony that wee are their bondmen for ever. 1

Both pamphlets encouraged their readers to see themselves in Lilburne, related his imprisonment to the general dissatisfaction with Parliament, pointed to the Commons and demanded his release. However neither suggested how the people should obtain the power rightfully theirs, or how they should set about getting Lilburne released. This was to become an increasing problem, as by late 1646, the Levellers actually possessed a party and rudimentary organisation.

Late in 1646 Lilburne published two pamphlets on the city government of London, trying to prove it had been more democratic in the past, before it was perverted by the powerful into an oligarchy. At the same time his supporters attempted to have the Mayor elected by the votes of all the freemen of the city. Lilburne's struggle with the Lords took on a more sinister character when they tried to keep him in solitary confinement, separated from his wife, by whom he

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.2.

kept in contact with his adherents. In reply he threatened to burn down the prison, himself included, and restrictions were relaxed. In An Anatomy of the Lords Tyranny Lilburne continues the narrative of the clash, which included him stopping his ears while the Lords had the charge against him read, and on another occasion forcing his gaolers to carry him to the House. I shall not discuss this pamphlet in detail, but one point should be made. Lilburne is at pains to emphasise that it is the Lords who seek trouble, not he, and tells of his spectacular resistance calmly, without passion or boasting. I think this is important, as Lilburne realised the necessity to avoid appearing merely temperamentally quarrelsome. This passage, where Lilburne, trying to avoid a confrontation, explains why he will not go to the Lords, is an example of this point.

Sir, I am a free-man of England, and therefore I am not to be used as a Slave, or Vassall, by the Lords, which they have already done, and would further doe. I am also a man of peace and quietnesse, and desire not to molest any, if I be not forced thereunto: therefore I desire you, as you tender my good, and your own; take this for answer, that I cannot, without turning traytor to my Liberties, dance attendance to their Lordships Barre: being bound in conscience, dutie to God, my selfe, mine, and my Country; to oppose their incroachments to the death: which by the strength of God I am resolved to doe. 1

(ii) Overton and the Lords, 1646

While Lilburne continued to defy the Lords in the summer and

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<sup>1</sup> An Anatomy of the Lords Tyranny, (1646), p.3. The whole passage is in italics.

autumn of 1646, the lead in the press was taken by Richard Overton, who came to prominence, eventually under his own name, with a remarkable series of pamphlets. The first, published in July, was entitled A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens, and other Free-born People Of England, To their owne House of Commons. Occasioned through the Illegall and Barbarous Imprisonment of that Famous and Worthy Sufferer for his Countries Freedoms, Lieutenant Col. John Lilburne. A Remonstrance addressed the Commons in a manner new to them, and not to be paralleled until Defoe's Legions Memorial.

Wee are well assured, yet cannot forget, that the cause of our choosing you to be Parliament-men, was to deliver us from all kind of Bondage, and to preserve the Common-wealth in Peace and Happinesse; For effecting whereof, we possessed you with the same Power that was in our selves to have done the same; For wee might justly have done it our selves without you, if we had thought it convenient; choosing you (as Persons whom wee thought fitly quallified, and Faithfull,) for avoiding some inconveniencies.

But ye are to remember, this was only of us but a Power of trust, (which is ever revokable, and cannot be otherwise,) and to be imployed to no other end, then our owne well-being; ... Wee are your Principalls, and you our Agents; it is a Truth which you cannot but acknowledge... 1

The casual denial of the people's necessity of acting through Parliament must have enraged such as Prynne and horrified the House, which rapidly started an investigation into its authorship.

There follows a denunciation of kings, who have always tried to make their subjects slaves. Yet despite Parliament's opposition to

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<sup>1</sup> Don. M. Wolfe, Leveller Manifestoes of the Puritan Revolution. (New York 1944), p.113.

Charles, they will make the pretence of levying war in his name, praying for him, and persecuting those who condemn him. Now they appear to want to reinstate him.

Have you shoke this Nation like an Earth-quake, to produce no more than this for us; It is for this, that ye have made so free use, & been so bold both with our Persons & Estates? And doe you (because of our readings /readines/ to comply with your desire in all things,) conceive us so sottish, as to be contented with such unworthy returnes of our trust and Love? No; it is high time wee be plaine with you; WEE are not, nor SHALL not be so contented... 1

The Commons must abolish kings, and remove the Lords from power, as they have no right to their privileges or negative voice. They may keep their possessions, and stand for the Commons if they wish to take part in politics. As a consequence of this, Lilburne and other prisoners of the Lords must be released.

A section blames the Lords for much of the war. Those not in agreement with the King and bishops have used the people to bring down the King, under the pretence of fighting for their liberties, only so that they can take power themselves. They have hung back from completing an outright victory, fearing to put supremacy in the hands of the Commons. They have allowed the King time to raise an army, and have hindered his defeat in the field, hoping to have him returned under their control. The Commons have "some of you been engaged,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.116.



and some of you ensnared, and the rest of you overborne with this Mystery, which you may now easily perceive, if you have a minde thereunto."<sup>1</sup> This leads Overton to his main theme, the castigation of the Commons for preferring to act as an independent authority rather than a representative of the people: the House will no longer even receive a petition without debating whether it infringes their privileges, which they interpret as highly as the King or the Lords do theirs.

All the Leveller grievances are detailed with some acidity. The Commons have supported religious persecution, and closed the presses to the opponents of the Presbyterians. Speaking in the name of the people, Overton reproves them: "But ye have listned to any Counsellis, rather then to the voice of us that trusted you: Why is it that you have stopped the Presse; but that you would have nothing but pleasing flattring Discourses, and go on to make yourselves partakers of the Lordship over us, without hearing any thing to the contrary."<sup>2</sup> The city government has not been reformed, nor the monopolies abolished. The nation's laws need reform as they are unworthy of a free people. Here Overton introduces an idea which runs through the pamphlet and was to be very useful to the Levellers, among others, during the interregnum. It is that when the Normans conquered England, they

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.120.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.123.

abolished or undermined the Saxon liberties and freedoms, both in law and government, replacing them with an arbitrary "Norman Yoke". Many extremists seized upon this conception as a means of dignifying their proposals with the traditional sanction of antiquity, sincerely representing innovation as a return to a golden age. Overton applies this to arbitrary monarchy and English law, which he sees as meant to bolster hereditary power and riches. Even Magna Charta is "but a beggerly thing, containing many markes of intollerable bondage."<sup>1</sup>

Overton states the case for those depressed by the war; in the following passage he makes a bitter indictment of the treatment of the poor, contrasting their state with that of the rich in a manner similar to Lilburne's and Walwyn's:

Yee know also, Imprisonment for Debt, is not from the beginning; Yet ye thinke not of these many Thousand Persons and Families that are destroyed thereby, yee are Rich, and abound in goods, and have need of nothing: but the afflictions of the poore; your hunger starved brethren, ye have no compassion of; Your zeal makes a noise as farre as Argiere, to deliver those captived Christians at the charge of others, but those whom your owne unjust Lawes hold captive in your owne Prisons; these are too neere you to thinke of; Nay, yee suffer poor Christians, for whom Christ died to kneel before you in the streets, aged, sick and cripled, begging your halfe-penny Charities, and yee rustle by them in your Coaches and silkes daily, without regard, or taking any course for their constant reliefe, their sight would melt the heart of any Christian, and yet it moves not you nor your Clergy. 2

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.124.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.125.

Press-ganging is condemned as a denial of freedom; if the Parliament took care that their government contented the common people they would need no pressing. Another grievance is that taxes are increasing to the point where they ruin the small tradesman.

Overton ends the pamphlet with a cool summary of the situation, ironically asking that the House should publish the good they have done for the people and the liberty they have won for them. The people still hope for better things, and the Commons have a last chance if they take them into their confidence, treading them as politically responsible partners:

Forsake, and utterly renounce all craftie and subtile intentions; hide not your thoughts from Us, and give us encouragement to be open-breasted unto you: Proclaime afore-hand, what yee determine to doe, in establishing any thing for continuance; and heare all things that can be spoken with or against the same; and to that intent, set the imprisoned Presses at liberty, that all mens understandings may be more conveniently informed, and convinced, as faire as is possible by the equity of your Proceedings.

Wee cannot but expect to be delivered from the Norman bondage, whereof wee now as well as our Predecessors, have felt the smart by these bloody warres; and from all unreasonable lawes made ever since that unhappy conquest; as wee have encouragement, wee shall informe you further, and guide you, as we observe your doings.

The Worke yee must note is ours, and not your owne, though ye are to be partakers with us in the well or ill doing thereof: and therefore ye must expect to heare more frequently from us then yee have done, nor will it be your wisdom to take these Admonitions and Cautions in evill part;... 1

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.128.

The only way to restore confidence is to order elections for a new representative body, as the mandate for the Long Parliament has long expired.

A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens shows the development of the Levellers' attempt to speak for the people; it is an alternative to Lilburne's highly personal style of journalism. Overton could hardly have adopted such a confident tone of writing in the first person. With the backing of some organisation and the knowledge of wide sympathy in London, he could take on himself to voice the demands of the people not only with power and dignity, but even with a show of truth. Instead of the role of Martin Marpriest Overton now wears the mask of an angry people, identified with the embryonic Leveller party. He assumed his new role with distinction. If he could not match Lilburne's personal intensity, my quotations indicate his advantages as a pamphleteer; his style is more economical and harder hitting, his organisation of a pamphlet incomparably more lucid.

A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens gives a coherent impression of controlled force, its tone varying from sardonic irony to anger and menace. The dominant note remains that of complete confidence; the almost casual way in which Overton reproves the Commons is quite different from his more typical manner of cocky, defensive courage. His pamphlet is a rhetorical achievement that required both more literary skill and more detachment than Lilburne possessed; the comparison with Legions Memorial is not unfavourable to the lesser

writer.

Overton followed A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens with An Alarum to the House of Lords, defending Lilburne once more with an aggressive condemnation of both Houses of Parliament. Next month, in August, he was arrested, on suspicion of having written A Remonstrance, and after he had refused to answer the questions of a Committee of Lords, imprisoned. In September, following the precedent of Lilburne, he published under his own name an account of his arrest and commitment, A Defiance Against All Arbitrary Usurpations or Encroachments either of the House of Lords, or any other, upon the Sovereignty of the Supreme House of Commons, ... or upon the Rights, Properties and Freedoms of the people in generall. He dramatises his defiance of the Lords, which included making his gaolers carry him forcibly to Newgate, as a stand of principle, though he is aware of the humorous aspect it must have, and uses the comedy of the situation to entertain his reader. A postscript, purporting to be from the publisher, puts the question: can Overton be "that reverend peece of sanctity, usually dignified or distinguished by the name of Young Martin Marpriest?"<sup>1</sup> Though hedging, the "publisher" defends both Martin and Overton as making a joint stand for freedom. Overton's next pamphlet, An Arrow against Tyrants and Tyranny, set out in detail his view of the freedom of the individual, infringed by the Lords' arbitrary authority. The Lords have no more right to this than the

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<sup>1</sup> A Defiance Against All Arbitrary Usurpations, (1646), p.25.

King, "and indeed they are as like him, as if they were spit out of his mouth."<sup>1</sup> He exhorts the Commons to action with egalitarian fervour:

... let not the greatest Peers in the land, be more respected with you, then so many old Bellewes-menders, Broom men, Coblers, Tinkers, or Chimney-sweepers who are all equally Free borne, with the hudget men, and loftiest Anachims in the Land. 2

The Commoners Complaint: or, A Dreadful Warning From Newgate, to the Commons of England, (February, 1647) is the last of this group of pamphlets, and deals with the consequences of Overton's arrest by the Lords. It takes the form of a letter to Henry Martin, Chairman of the Committee for the Commons' Liberties, and sympathetic friend to the Levellers. Overton opens by promising an account of the injustice done first to himself, then to his wife. He resumes his own story from November 3, 1646, after an abortive visit to Martin's Committee. Angered by the failure of the Committee to take responsibility for him, Overton refused to go to gaol unless he was shown a new warrant, claiming the Lords' jurisdiction over him had now ended with his application to the rightful authority of the Commons. If the Committee wanted him in gaol, they could have him carried there. In several pages of careful argument Overton justifies his action; no man should be made to consent, however slightly, to be his own executioner. Thus, especially in an illegal imprisonment, the Lords have no right

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<sup>1</sup> An Arrow against Tyrants and Tyranny, (1646), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.20.



to expect any gesture of compliance from Overton. However odd it may appear, his act has been a deliberate demonstration of fundamental liberty. The attraction of this vindication lies in Overton's frequently sardonic tone: "And therefore as their Lordships in that their arbitrary capacity found Warrents, so should their Lordships find Leggs to obey them, for I was resolved, mine should not be enslaved to that their usurpation to do their Arbitrary Drudgery, I would rather loose my life then in that kind to do them that vasselage."<sup>1</sup> Having cleared the ground with these arguments, Overton tells the exciting and undignified story of how he was forcibly dragged to Newgate, clutching Coke's Institutes to his stomach, with his feet and legs dangling "like a couple of farthin Candles."<sup>2</sup> He preserves a happy balance between the violence and comedy of the scene, cheerfully admitting the humour of his predicament, but not letting his readers forget that it illustrates a serious problem.

It is in his account of the brutality of the gaolers towards his wife that Overton is most brilliant. Mary Overton had been arrested with her husband, and the issue was her transfer to Bridewell, notoriously filled with prostitutes. Like her husband, and on the grounds that the Lords warrant was illegal, she refused to move, though she was pregnant and in no condition to be manhandled. In Overton's hands the story of her removal becomes a tiny satiric epic, as he derisively

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Tracts on Liberty, III, 381.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.385.



contrasts the momentous difficulties that confront the City Marshal in the execution of his unpleasant task, with its trivial objective.

We join the scene after Mary Overton's first refusal to depart:

... I say no sooner had this Turky-cock Marshall heard of her uprightness to the Commons of England, but up he bristled his feathers and looked as bigg and as bugg as a Lord, and in the height and scorne of derision (just as if he had been Speaker to the House of Peers pro tempore) out he belched his fury and told her, that if she would not go, then she should be carried in a Porters Basket, or else draged at a Carts Arse.

But she modestly reply'd that he might do as it seemed good unto him, for she was resolved on her course, but thereat his worship being put into a prerogative chase; out he struts in his Arbitrary Fury, as if he would have forthwith leavied whole Armies, and Drovers of Porters and Carr-men to advance the poore little harmlesse innocent woman and her tender Babe to Bridewell. ... but departing in that insolent turbulent chase, he sent for a couple of Porters, but when they came to her, like honest & discreet men, they told him, that they would not meddle with a woman that was with child, and had a young suckling Infant in her Armes, least in so doing they might doe that to day which they might answer for to morrow.

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Then this grim Phylistin of the House of Peers, being thus deserted of his forraingne forces, mustered up his Life Guard of Goalers servants, or hangmen Deputies, and therewith resolved to storne her, and advancing to her Chamber doore, first he attempted to circumvent her by his pollicy with fair, hypocritically, specious promises of his and their Lordships favour and grace, in case she should open the doore and submit her selfe, but she slighted his proffers, & contemned all favour flowing from that most bitter and corrupt prerogative Fountaine.

Whereupon he caused his men to break open the doore, and entring her Chamber, struts towards her like a Crow in a gutter, and with his valiant lookes like a man of mettle assailes her and her Babe, and by violence attempt to pluck the tender Babe out of her Armes, but she forcibly defended it, and kept it in despite of his Man-hood: then he and Christopher Marshall his brother

Sam: Tolson, and divers of his servants by the Marshalls Command example & Authority laid violent hands upon her, and drag'd her down the staires, and in that infamous barbarous manner, drew her headlong upon the stones in all the dirt and mire of the streetes, with the poore Infant still crying and mourning in her Armes, whose life they spared not to hazard by the inhumain barbarous usage, and all the way as they went, utterly to defame and render her infamous in the streets, the fellows which dragged and carried her on two Cudgels, calling her Strumpet and vild Whore, thereby to possesse the people, that she was no woman of honest & godly Conversation, whom they so barbarously abused, but a vile strumpet or whore, and were dragging to Bridewell that common shore & sinke of Bauds & Whores, &c. 1

The vivid metaphors with which Overton builds up his portrait of the Marshal all emphasise that he represents the House of Lords, increasing the comic disproportion of the scene. The analogy of warfare ridicules the Marshal's efforts, which contrast with the humanity of the porters. Overton skilfully handles his narrative to lead up to the climax, catching the Marshal's increasing frustration until, his pride at stake, he is ready for violence.

Stressing again that his cause and that of his wife is that of the whole commons of England, Overton concludes by appealing to the House of Commons to clarify the situation. Either the House must redress his wrongs, or admit that England is still ruled by Lordly prerogative, "that we may loose our labour no longer in petitioning, appealing, complaining, and seeking for reliefe at your hands, that such as will may sit down as contented slaves with halters about their

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.389-391.

necks to be hanged up till the pleasure of that House (forsooth) shall be further signified."<sup>1</sup>

In The Commoners Complaint Overton extends the technique of personalising political issues to touch his readers' self respect and feelings for their wives and families. Domestic emotions easily appreciated and common to all are set forth in a fascinating narrative to illustrate the injustice of the Lords' proceedings. Overton's sense of humour prevents this from being oppressive; he tells of a minor victory against the smooth face of officialdom, gained by passive disobedience. He and his wife have forced off the mask of legality to reveal the naked and brutal force beneath. The satiric qualities Overton showed as Martin Marpriest are now applied to a new object; this polished piece of political journalism would have left contemporary readers in no doubt of what the Levellers were fighting for.

#### F. The Leveller Party in Action, 1647-1648

##### (i) The Large Petition and Rash Oaths Unwarrantable

The year 1647 was the first in which the Levellers possessed real political weight. In London a party organisation was in existence, its immediate purpose being to circulate petitions for signature, thus mobilising its supporters. The petition signed by large numbers of people - and the Levellers were capable of accumulating up to perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.394-395.

100,000 signatures - had many advantages for a new party. It created an organisation, publicised the movement, helped educate the people, and made them feel that they were participating in politics through common action. It was an ancient and legal form that could not be easily criticised. Walwyn was prominent in the preparation of petitions, including those of 1647. The following description of the organisation behind the petitions was written by Lilburne and Wildman early in 1648, but it probably describes the arrangements of the previous year accurately:

... there is a Method and Order settled in all the Wards in London, and the out Parishes and Suburbs; they have appointed severall active men in every Ward and Division, to be a Committee, to take speciall care of the businesse, and to appoint active men in every Parish to read the Petition at set meetings for that purpose, and to take Subscriptions, and to move as many as can possibly to goe in person when the day of delivering it shall be appointed; and they intend to give notice of that time to all the adjacent Counties, that as many of them as possibly can, may also joyne with them in the same day... 1

In their petitions the Levellers enjoyed support from the influential Independent Churches, their allies in the struggle for toleration.

A further extension of Leveller influence was rapidly taking place among the rank and file of the New Model Army, a receptive audience for Leveller pamphlets. In the spring of 1647, with the help of pressure from the Leveller soldiers, the army was beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in Walter Frost, A Declaration of Some Proceedings of L.Col.John Lilburne, And his Associates, (1648), William Haller and Godfrey Davies, The Leveller Tracts, (New York, 1944), p.103.

its defiance of Parliament, demanding in its manifestoes not only the remedy of the soldiers' grievances, but the enacting of a range of Leveller proposals. The army Levellers produced many pamphlets which I shall not touch upon as I am concentrating on the London leaders. Brailsford offers an analysis of the activity in the army, the democratic development of the agitators and the Council of War.<sup>1</sup> The army movement was stimulated and conditioned by the pamphlets of Lilburne and Overton in particular, and it was in complete sympathy with the London party. The agitators were in contact with Lilburne and concerted measures with him; he helped them in print and with money, and they tried to secure his release. Nevertheless the army movement was separate from that in London, and acted on its own initiative; it would be a mistake to think of it as merely a branch of the London Levellers.

In February and March, 1647, there was a series of Leveller petitions, supported by pamphlets from Lilburne and Overton, still in the Tower. The most important was the Large Petition of March, its full heading being; To the right honourable and supreme Authority of this Nation, the Commons in Parliament assembled. The humble  
Petition of many thousands, earnestly desiring the glory of God, the  
freedom of the Commonwealth, and the peace of all men. Drafted by

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<sup>1</sup> The Levellers and the English Revolution, Ch.10, pp.166-228.

the conciliatory hand of Walwyn this made the following requests, worth mentioning as the first party programme: that the supremacy of the Commons should be assured by depriving the King and Lords of their veto; that the Lords' prisoners should be released; that monopolies should be abolished; imprisonment for debt ended; the laws simplified and reformed; unlimited religious toleration established; tithes abolished, and capital punishment for theft ended. It did not mention extension of the franchise, though this had been raised by Lilburne in 1646 in his discussion of the London city government.

The Large Petition had a stormy history, narrated by Walwyn in Gold tried in the Fire, (June, 1647). After the Commons had refused to hear it the Levellers brought further petitions in its favour, presenting them in large demonstrations of their strength; on one occasion an ugly brawl broke out and some petitioners were arrested. The last petition significantly altered the emphasis, endorsing the demands of the rank and file of the New Model. The affair provided for the Levellers a dramatic illustration of how the Commons no longer represented the people of England.

Lilburne built on the affair of the petitions and redirected Leveller interest in Rash Oaths Unwarrantable, and the taking of them inexcusable (May 1647). His theme is that the Commons have forfeited all claim to authority by their decline into "a conspiracy and confederacy of lawlesse, unlimited, and unbounded men, that have

actually destroyed the Lawes and Liberties of England ..."<sup>1</sup> Lilburne provides a huge catalogue of the oppressions that the Commons have either committed themselves, or failed to reform; this includes an account of the petitions and an enthusiastic defence of the proposals contained in the Large Petition. He takes his condemnation of the Commons to its logical conclusion, "... if you, our ordinary and legall means, will not preserve us, but rather destroy us, we may justly by extraordinary and rationall means preserve ourselves, and destroy you our treacherous destroyers."<sup>2</sup>

What gave substance to this threat was the Leveller agitation in the New Model, now well advanced and enjoying general support. Lilburne argues the justice of the demands of the army Levellers and prints their manifestoes, appealing to the army against the Commons. He justifies the army taking power in order to institute reforms by the same arguments used against the King by Parliament; the army is a far truer representative of the people at the moment, and it is its duty to ensure the peoples' liberty by providing for a new representative body, to be elected on a reformed and extended franchise. Rash Oaths Unwarrantable made explicit the link between the army radicals and the London Leveller party, and pointed a new way towards

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<sup>1</sup> Rash Oaths Unwarrantable, p.6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.20.



reform.

(ii) Jonahs Cry out of the Whales Belly

The main interest of the summer of 1647 was the overawing of Parliament by the army. The weakness of the army Levellers was soon made clear by the way Cromwell and the officers asserted their view of the situation of the rank and file, contenting themselves with redressing only the specific grievances of the soldiers, neither releasing Lilburne nor working for more general reform. Lilburne began to appreciate the conflict between officers, or 'Grandeess' and the agitators, and I shall resume with an important pamphlet from him that voiced his disappointment with Cromwell in a new form, Jonahs Cry out of the Whales Belly. It is a collection of his personal letters, mainly to Cromwell himself, reprinted in full. The first, dated March 25, 1647, reveals Lilburne embarrassed at having even to appear to reprove his hero. Nevertheless he feels it his duty to warn the Lieutenant General of the need to end the power of the Presbyterians and of the danger of splitting with the agitators. If the army disbands before petitioning Parliament, Cromwell will be regarded as the betrayer of English Liberties. A letter of April 10 to Cromwell gives evidence of Lilburne's emotional attachment to him as he asks desperately for an assurance of good faith. Another letter demands a march on London, and a purge of evil counsellors.

The last letter, dated July 1, is in a calmer tone; Lilburne has made up his mind that the Grandeess have betrayed the peoples' cause.

He avows that he has applied to the private soldiery, and helped them to organise with advice and money. Cromwell is accused of trying to suppress the agitators; the Grandees are "transcendently degenerated, & have bought and sold, (and intend visibly more fully to do it) the Lawes, Liberties, and Justice of the Kingdom."<sup>1</sup> It is because Lilburne's opinion of Cromwell has changed that he is printing these letters. Unless Cromwell comes to see him soon, he will use his interest in open opposition. To emphasise his own sadness and Cromwell's apostasy, he prints one of his letters to him of 1645, full of generous warmth and devotion. In a postscript he warns the soldiers of the army's perilous position, verging on tyranny, as its original commission is dissolved in the state of nature caused by Parliament's treachery, and its purpose of reform betrayed by its officers. The method of Jonahs Cry out of the Whales Belly is dramatic, following the strained emotions of Lilburne during the crucial months of 1647. The result is an account of the fall and apostasy of England's greatest patriot, unfolded in the personal letters of his former admirer. Again feelings normally considered private, find their way with success into political journalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonahs Cry out of the Whales Belly, p.9.

Lilburne held that the failure of Parliament to fulfil its true function (i.e. assume the supreme power as the people's representative, protect English Liberties, exercise power democratically) had created a "state of nature," when the people had to find the best way they could to secure a return to legality. He had explained this fully in Rash Oaths Unwarrantable (1647).

(iii) The Earnest Petition

Lilburne's fears proved justified in that Cromwell neither released him nor initiated Leveller reforms. In September he made a full scale attack on Cromwell and Ireton, portraying them as self-seeking politicians. He admitted responsibility for the agitators, and refused indignantly the Grandees suggestion that he should petition the Lords for his liberty. He advised the common soldiers to stand against their officers for reform, but without much hope that they would do so. Despite the Putney debates, conceded because Cromwell felt the need of a broad base, the agitators were circumvented by the traditional authority of the officers, and Cromwell retained control of the army. In January 1648 the initiative came back to the London wing of the Levellers, where Lilburne turned from encouraging the soldiers to the promotion of a new petition, aided by John Wildman. He was on bail, and so was free to attend meetings and whip up enthusiasm. At one such meeting a spying clergyman informed the House, and both leaders were arrested.

The Earnest Petition<sup>1</sup> elaborated further the Leveller programme, which I shall list for convenience. It contained demands for the supremacy of the Commons; the reform of the law; impartial justice for all, rich and poor alike; restraint of Parliamentary Committees

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<sup>1</sup> Full title: To the Supream Authority of England, the Commons Assembled in Parliament: The earnest Petition of many Free-born People of this Nation.

from imprisoning commoners without legal procedure; prison reform; abolition of monopolies; publication of public accounts to check the destination of the heavy taxes; the franchise for all over 21, not servants or beggars; the distribution of seats readjusted; the abolition of oaths on religion; the recovery of the lands due to the poor, and the advancement of native industry to employ them and better their wages; taxes by proportion not excise; and reparations to those who suffered under Charles. Surprisingly, the names of Prynne and Bastwick appear in this connection, presumably in an attempt to raise really wide support. This impressive list of reforms drafted by Lilburne is introduced with biblical prophecies of doom:

"The earnest petition of many Free-born People of this Nation./

SHEWETH,/ That the devouring fire of the Lords wrath hath burnt in the bowels of this miserable Nation, until its almost consumed./

That upon due search into the causes of Gods heavy Judgements, we find (a) that injustice and oppression, have been the common National sins, for which the Lord hath threatened woes, confusions and

desolations, unto any People or Nation: Woe (saith God) to the

oppressing City. Zeph.3.1."<sup>1</sup> The language of the proposals themselves is simple and clear, in accepted petition style.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfe, Leveller Manifestoes, p.263. The note (a) gives a list of biblical references.

It is from the reply to the petition, a government pamphlet, that we know most about Leveller organisation. A Declaration of Some Proceedings of L.Col. John Lilburne, and his Associates was written by Walter Frost, the Secretary of the Committee of both Houses, who wrote an order of Parliament, an indication of how seriously Lilburne and the Levellers were regarded. It included a statement made by George Masterson, the informer present at one of Lilburne and Wildman's meetings. Apparently the leading Levellers held meetings six days a week, and also were to meet at Dartford to receive the reports of their Kent agents about the petition. An attempt was being made to set up a nationwide organisation of agents, which already covered the home counties. At the meeting of January 17, 1648, Lilburne had announced that thirty thousand copies of the petition were to come off the press the next day, and a collection would be taken by treasurers from all supporters to pay for the expense of distribution.<sup>1</sup> Frost reprints several public letters from Lilburne and Wildman to Levellers outside London, in which they are urged to

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<sup>1</sup> This figure was later changed to three thousand, in The Triumph stain'd (1648). See Wolfe, Leveller Manifestoes, p.259, note 1. Estimates of the number of Leveller tracts published are few; Walwyn stated that John Goodwin's congregation gave fifty shillings towards printing ten thousand copies of his short tract A Word in Season (1646) Walwyn's Just Defence against the Aspersions cast upon him in A late unchristian Pamphlet entituled, Walwyns Wiles, (1649) in The Leveller Tracts 1647-1653, ed. William Haller and Godfrey Davies, p.393. At a guess, the number of copies of an edition of a longer tract may well have been two or three thousand.

organise to support the petition. Frost goes to great lengths to prove a party in existence.

In the remainder of his reply Frost makes some sensible points against the petition; for instance, the scarcity of food is caused by bad harvests, not by any fault of Parliament. The petition fails to recognise Parliament's right to repeal laws, and consequently to disregard previous ones. Frost describes the new uses the Levellers are making of the petition: "... a Petition is to set forth your grievances, and not to give a rule to the Legislative Power; if you meane it shall be an Edict, which you must compose, and Parliament must verifie, call it no more a Petition."<sup>1</sup> This petition is designed to make Parliament odious to the people.

Frost makes a good criticism of the over violent and exaggerated language that Leveller pamphlets sometimes indulged in. The object of his scorn was a brief tract published with the petition, The Mournfull Cries of Many Thousand Poor Tradesmen, an appeal to the small tradesmen of London who were suffering from the war, which was probably not the work of the leaders. In a tone of near hysterical violence it plays on the horrors of poverty:

Oh that the cravings of our Stomacks could be heard  
by the Parliament and City! Oh that the Tears of our  
poor famishing Babes were bottled! Oh that their tender  
Mothers Cryes for bread to feed them were ingraven in Brasse! ...

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, Haller and Davies, Leveller Tracts, p.118.



O you Members of Parliament, and rich men in the City, that are at ease, and drink Wine in Bowls, and stretch your selves upon Beds of Down, you that grind our faces, and flay off our skins, Will no man amongst you regard, will no man behold our faces black with Sorrow and Famine? 1

The author's straining after conceits makes his laudable message much less effective than Overton's similar passage of poverty mentioned above.<sup>2</sup> He proved an easy target for Frost's ridicule:

It seemes to be written by some of the Professors of Rhetorick in Newgate, or Ludgate, whose long practice of that kind of Oratory had made him as great a stranger to truth, as to blushing. The whole matter of it composed of so grosse an hypocrisie, that it scarce deserves that name; mixed with impudency, and lyes, of the same Genius with the Petition, boldly affirming in generals, and brings not forth one particular with prooffe. Where are those famishing babes? and where are those pining carkasses? Why are they not brought forth to the view of some pitifull eye? You cry for pitie, why shew you not the object? ... The language looks more like the ebullition of wine than the cries of want. 3

Frost gives a biography of Lilburne, which minimises his service to Parliament and portrays him as an inflated troublemaker, a compulsive disturber of all authority. It is even suggested that his enthusiasm for Parliament has diminished since his imprisonment by the Royalists in Oxford. Frost both displays and plays on the fear of popular

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfe, *Leveller Manifestoes*, p.126.

<sup>2</sup> See p.171.

<sup>3</sup> Haller and Davies, *Leveller Tracts*, p.129.



participation in politics, raising the spectre of Jack Straw to show the results of organised popular action, "Horrid, and Barbarous force and violence".<sup>1</sup> At the root of the Levellers' proposals is the desire to reduce all men's estates to an equality. He ends with this sage admonition: "Be perswaded to study to be quiet, and doe your owne business, to live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you; and leave the publique affaires to those to whom God and the Kingdom hath committed them."<sup>2</sup>

(iv) A Whip for the House of Lords

Lilburne replied to Frost in A Whip for the House of Lords, published in February 1648. It is one of his best pamphlets and I shall examine it in detail. Lilburne opens by quoting a letter of his to Frost, an acquaintance, written in a tone of patronage: "I have looked upon you formerly as an honest Englishman (though full of feares, and of a spirit possessed with two much compliance with unrighteousness)."<sup>3</sup> If Frost does not deny he is the author of A Declaration of Some Proceedings of L. Col. John Lilburne, "I shall take you (as in it you say the Lords took me pro confesso) and make in due time farther addresses to Mr. Walter Frost, from his friend John Lilburne."<sup>3</sup> Lilburne dramatises the circumstances of his reply,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.104.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.134.

<sup>3</sup> A Whip for the House of Lords, p.1.

admitting the reader behind the scenes. Frost not replying, the pamphlet proper starts.

Lilburne is concerned to denigrate Frost and destroy his assumption of superiority. Frost is a servant of the Grandees, hired to bespatter their opponents. Anyone who knows the Levellers will at once see the falsity of Frost's charge that they are anarchists, which its maker cannot substantiate. If the Levellers had been "soft wax, wether-cocks, Creatures, everything and nothing, but to serve great mens ends,"<sup>1</sup> Frost would not have vilified them as he has. With cold contempt Lilburne compares Frost's adherence to authority, with his own career; some Levellers might have reached equally official positions as Frost if they had chosen, "having as much brains and parts, (and a little more resolution) as your self."<sup>2</sup> Lilburne undercuts Frost's air of lofty scorn by remarking that the army levellers had set Cromwell in his present powerful position, who in return studies "to crush and dash them to pieces like a cube of Glasses". In return to Frost's complaint about the press:

For printing and dispearsing all manner of false and scandalous Pamphlets, I retort that upon you, and the rest of the mercenary pensioners of your Grandees: lying Diarnalls and Pamphlets being one of the chiefe meanes to support their rotten reputation, and new attained unto sovereignty, but I am sure you and they,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.3.

have almost lockt up the presses as close as the  
Great Turk in Turkey doth, Tyrants very wel knowing,  
nothing is likely to destroy their tyranny, &  
procure liberty to the people, as knowledge is,  
which they very well knew is procured by printing,  
and disparsing rational discourses. 1

Having made his own character and doings so prominent in the Leveller cause, Lilburne needed to prevent his enemies using them to blacken it. He proceeds to answer in detail Frost's version of his life-story, retelling the events of his imprisonment at Oxford, and his dealings with the Lords. Thus he reaches the matter of the petition in a good position to state his case, having struck a few damaging blows at Frost and re-established his own reputation. He takes up the narrative when he was called to the Commons bar to hear the accusations of Masterson, "the lying, malicious Judas priest".<sup>2</sup> While Masterson spoke Lilburne paid little attention, thinking over his defence; when called to answer, he demanded liberty of speech, and promised to give an account of the petition, a reversal of his previous policy. Probably pleased to get some evidence, the Commons agreed, and Lilburne had the opportunity to speak at length in one of his most striking stands. He quotes the speech almost in full.

Speaking in a soft voice, Lilburne started by admitting that he had been involved in the business of the petition, then deftly switched

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.9.

to Masterson's accusation that at the meeting he had said that the petition was merely a means of raising the people to destroy Parliament. Lilburne explained that what he had actually said was in answer to a question asked him, why did the common people favour the King and hate Parliament and all puritans, Levellers included; his answer gave him the opportunity to enlarge on his aims and methods, and is worth quoting in full:

Vnto which Mr. Speaker, my self, &c answered to this effect, the people are generally malignant, and more for the King then for the Parliament, but whats, the reason? but because their burthens are greater now than before, and are likely to continue without any redresse, or any visible, valuable consideration, holden out unto them, for all the blood and treasure they have spent for their liberties and freedoms. And the reason why they were so ignorant, Mr. Speaker, because that though the Parliament had declared in generall, that they engaged to fight for their liberties, yet they never particularly told them what they were, nor never distinctly held forth the glory and splendor of them, to make them in love with them, and so study how to preserve them, and for want of a cleare declaring what was the particulars of the Kings rights, and the nature of his office, and what was the Parliaments particular priviledges, power and duty, to the people of the Kingdome, that chosed and betrustrd them, and what particularly was the peoples rights and freedoms, they were hereby left in blindnesse and ignorance, and by reason of their oppressions, because they knew no better, doted implicitly on the King, as the fountain of peace, justice and righteousnesse, without whom nothing that was good, could have a being in this kingdome ...

But Mr. Speaker, they were told that in this Petition the people had clearly held out to them, and that upon the undeniable principles of reason and justice, the Kings rights, the Parliaments and their own; and that the two former, were, and of right alwayes ought to be, subservient to the good of the latter; and they were told, it was not so much persons as things that

the people doated upon; and therefore undoubtedly those that should really hold out justice and righteousness unto them, were those that they would be in love with, and therefore in mercy to our selves, and in love and compassion to our native Country, it was pressed, that every man that desired to fulfill his end in comming into the world, and to be like unto his master in doing good, should vigorously promote and further this just and gallant Petition, as the principle meanes to procure safety, peace, justice and prosperitie, to the land of our nativitie, and unite the hearts and spirits of our divided Countrymen in love againe each unto other, and in love unto us, which they could not choose but afford, when they should visibly see we endeavoured their good as well, and as much as our own, there being all the principles of foundations of freedome and iustice that our hearts could desire and long after, in this very Petition; And if our greatest end were not accomplished in our prosecuting of this Petition, viz. the Parliaments establishing the things therein desired, yet the promoting of it would begit understanding and knowledge in the people, when they should heare it and read it, and discourse upon it, and if nothing but that were effected, our labour would not be totally lost, for nothing did moe instate tyrants in secure possession of Tyranny, then ignorance and blindnesse in the people. And therefore for the begitting of knowledge, it was requisite it should be promoted. 1

Here Lilburne treats his readers to a genuine insight into the problem that was to confound the interregnum governments, the basic ill-will of the people. Stating his belief that only by a wider participation of the people in government could the state be secure, Lilburne could show the necessity of educating them in politics. A King might rely on ignorant subjects, a newly constituted state could not. Thus he

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.11-13.



puts the fears of popular disturbance expressed in Frost's pamphlet in a new light; could the Parliament afford to take such an authoritarian attitude once they had unseated the King with the aid of the people? The Leveller petition is pictured as a step on the road to a democratic state; its justification could serve for any of the Levellers' journalism. Lilburne's language is clear, if slightly repetitious, full of his own energy and involvement.

The rest of the speech spreads over a wide area, running over Lilburne's case and his grievances against the Lords, and the old subject of his reparations and arrears. Lilburne omitted some pages of attack on Cromwell and Ireton, perhaps because he still had scruples about completely alienating them. The narrative of his commitment after the speech completes the pamphlet, covering Lilburne's attempt to question his warrant, and an ugly brawl that broke out between his supporters and a military guard sent to take him to prison.

This pamphlet is perhaps the most successful of Lilburne's efforts at combining his personal fortunes with the burning issues of the time. His observations on the petition and the general problem of Interregnum government alone mark him as far more than a quarrelsome egoist. The narrative is a lively record of his two days at Westminster, stretching his endurance to the limit, which lends conviction to his arguments and accusations. The pamphlet shows how well Lilburne could manage without a conventionally ordered structure. The loose construction

enables the narrative and the reply to Frost to be combined with the usual wide variety of grievances, held together by theme rather than order. As the broad lines of A Whip for the House of Lords are obvious, Lilburne's changes of course presumably did him no harm with his readers.

#### G. The Bloody Project. 1648

The next development of the Leveller cause, apparently at a standstill, was occasioned by the Second Civil War. The army, reunited under Cromwell, reasserted their supreme importance in the state. As the war ended unhappily for them, the Presbyterians in Parliament tried the paradoxical move of releasing Lilburne, hoping that his influence in the army would weaken Cromwell. Lilburne, however, disliking the Scotch-Presbyterian alliance to return Charles, gave his support to Cromwell against Parliament once more. Cromwell, having decided to execute Charles, had a real need of Leveller support, as their hostility could have been decisive amid the general unpopularity of the measure. All seemed set for another opportunity for the Levellers to secure another Agreement of the People under army auspices.

The Bloody Project was published in August 1648, towards the end of the Second Civil War. In it William Walwyn, returning to the press after a long silence, made a dispassionate examination of the reasons for which the war was being fought, paving the way for Leveller



pressure. He opens with novel detachment to the war: "In all undertakings, which may occasion war or bloodshed, men have great need to be sure that their cause be right, both in respect of themselves and others: for if they kill men themselves, or cause others to kill, without a just cause, and upon extreamest necessity, they not only disturbe the peace of men, and families, and bring misery and poverty upon a Nation, but indeed are absolute murtherers."<sup>1</sup> Walwyn stresses the necessity of understanding why one is fighting, appealing particularly to men of conscience and religion. He expounds the war as a quarrel of particular interests, those of the Presbyterians, the Independents and the King, none of whom care for the people. Under the pretence of examining these interests impartially, in a manner probably borrowed from Marchamont Needham,<sup>2</sup> Walwyn skillfully insinuates the Leveller programme as the genuine interest of the people. Neither King nor Parliament evade his irony:

I beseech you, (you that are so forward and active to engage in the defence of the Kings, Presbyterian, or Independent Interest, and yet know no just cause for either) consider, was it sufficient that the King at first invited you in generall termes to joyn with him, for the defence of the true Protestant Religion, his own just Prerogatives, the Priviledges of Parliament, and the Liberty of the Subject; but never declared in particular what that Protestant religion was he would have defended, or what Prerogative would please him,

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<sup>1</sup> Haller and Davies, Leveller Tracts, p.135.

<sup>2</sup> The Case of the Kingdom stated (1647)

what priviledges he would allow the Parliament, or what Freedoms the People?

Or was it sufficient thinke you now, that the Parliament invited you at first upon generall termes, to fight for the maintenance of the true Protestant Religion, the Libertyes of the People, and Priviledges of Parliament; when neither themselves knew, for ought is yet seen, nor you, nor any body else, what they meant by the true Protestant Religion, or what the Liberties of the People were, or what those Priviledges of Parliament were, for which yet neverthesse thousands of men have been slain, and thousands of Familyes destroyed? 1

Many joined Parliament believing that it would end religious persecution, remove the negative voice of the King and Lords, and remedy the kingdom's many grievances. Did such expect to see interrogatories preserved, commoners imprisoned by the Lords, tithes unchanged, and the law unreformed? "Was the perpetuating of Parliament, and the oppressions they have brought upon you and yours, a part of that Liberty of the People you fought for?"<sup>2</sup> The army seemed about to institute genuine reforms, but once in power and their particular aims obtained, those who pressed for the people's freedoms were shot as mutineers. Though the Presbyterians now declaim against the power of the sword in Independent hands, are they not striving to get it back into theirs, and enforce their will with it. All the quarrel in the kingdom is one of parties, the pulling down of one tyrant to set up another.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.136-7.

<sup>2</sup> Haller and Davies, Leveller Tracts, p.138.

At this point Walwyn gives his readers a selection of genuine reforms for which to fight, rather than for a particular interest. The most important is the establishing of the supreme authority, the only body that can justly call for war. Unless the supreme authority is recognised to be the Commons the people may only fight to enslave themselves. Secondly the cause for fighting should be clearly stated by the supreme authority. The only causes worth fighting for, after the supremacy, are a new Parliament, an end of impressment, freedom of conscience, impartial and universal justice, the end of the excise and tithes, all planks of the Leveller platform. Those who adopt these reforms are to be supported, those who reject them declined. Those who lead the interests are wealthy, and care nothing for the sufferings of the poorer men in the war. For this reason matters should if possible be settled by argument and discussion rather than fighting: "The King, Parliament, great men in the City and Army, have made you but the stairs by which they have mounted to Honor, Wealth and Power. The only Quarrel that hath been, and at present is but this, namely, whose slaves the people shall be."<sup>1</sup>

The Bloody Project is stamped with Walwyn's characteristic belief that conflict is largely caused by misunderstanding, and that the common people have only one interest, which their reason will be

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.145

able to appreciate. By identifying the Levellers with the people's interest Walwyn is able to argue their cause without mentioning the party, or even admitting that there is one. He gives a convincing impression of impartiality in his appeal to the war-weary soldiers and answers, in a manner that many of Parliament's dissatisfied supporters must have found attractive, the basic question of why the Civil War was fought.

#### H. The Leveller press campaign of 1649

##### (i) England's New Chains Discovered

I shall not give an account of Cromwell's attempt to ally with the Levellers in late 1648. In the negotiation of December for an Agreement of the People Lilburne and his friends forced large concessions on the Grandees, in a conference that he considered final. Upon finding the Grandees further altered the document, he published the Levellers' own Agreement on December 10, but forbore any further opposition. The Levellers were for the early months of 1649 in a cleft stick, reluctant to antagonise Cromwell until they were sure he would not put at least some of their policies, contained in the modified Agreement of the Grandees, into practice. The Levellers remained unimpressively silent at the execution of Charles I, which their ideas had helped promote; Lilburne previously had insisted an Agreement of the People should precede any moves against the King. Lilburne, tired and disillusioned, considered retirement from politics,

while Walwyn took no further part in Leveller meetings. It took the announcement of the new government of the Rump and Council of State, a complete negation of any democracy the Levellers had hoped for, to bring the party together for its last united stand, this time an outright hostility to Cromwell's government.

The press campaign of the first six months of 1649 was the Levellers' last and most polished sally in political journalism. The leaders, matured by experience, plied their last effective weapon in the finest concerted use of the pamphlet in the Civil War period. In addition they were backed by the Moderate a weekly Leveller newspaper that contained a highly sympathetic editorial, and reported Leveller moves, such as the petitions, in detail, printing relevant documents. Pauline Gregg suspects Walwyn of writing some of its editorials late in 1648.<sup>1</sup>

Lilburne as usual struck the first blow, appearing at the bar of the Commons with a petition bearing the resounding title, Englands New Chains Discovered. This criticises the officers Agreement, and reasserts the unadulterated Leveller programme of reform. It expresses the fear that though the Commons have declared themselves supreme, proving years of Leveller agitation to be justified, they have done it only for the purpose of executing the king and no real improvement of the people's liberty is intended. Parliament has used its new

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<sup>1</sup> Freeborn John, p.243.

authority to establish a High Court without a jury, to continue pressing and to restrict printing. Lilburne's tone can be detected in this sardonic denunciation of the government.

Those Petitioners that have moved in behalf of the people, how have they bin entertained? Sometimes with the complement of empty thanks, their desires in the mean time not at all considered; at other times meeting with Reproches and Threats for their constancy and publike affections, and with violent motions, that their Petitions be burnt by the common Hangman, whilst others are not taken in at all; to so small an account are the people brought, even while they are flattered with notions of being the Original of all just power. And lastly, for compleating this new kind of liberty, a Council of State is hastily erected for Guardians thereof, who to that end are possessed with power to order and dispose all the forces appertaining to England by Sea or Land, to dispose of the publike Treasure, to command any person whatsoever before them, to give oath for the discovering of Truth, to imprison any that shall dis-obey their commands, and such as they shall judge contumacious. What now is become of that liberty that no mans person shall be attached or imprisoned, or otherwise dis-eased of his Free-Hold, or free Customs, but by lawful judgement of his equals? <sup>1</sup>

Lilburne denounces the repression of the Leveller soldiery, still trying to preserve the democratic organisation of 1647. The Grandees are accused of mercenary grasping after power, aiming at dictatorship. Lilburne appeals to the Rump to attempt to rid England of military government, dissolve the Council of State and themselves bring in Leveller reforms, which are again listed. Naturally this move was planned as a public demonstration and appeal, rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Haller and Davies, Leveller Tracts, p.162-63

from any idea that the Rump would suddenly turn Leveller. Printed with the petition is the speech made by Lilburne at the bar of the House while presenting it. He owns himself delighted to see the Commons recognised as the supreme power, and testifies that he is the spokesman for "a company of honest men living in and about London",<sup>1</sup> the supporters of the petition of September 11, 1648, who have persistently testified to the principles contained in the petition. The Levellers have not dared to get signatures, fearing the petition would be confiscated, but all those present are prepared to stand by it. For himself Lilburne is "...sorry I have but one life to lose, in maintaining the Truth, Justice and Righteousness, of so gallant a piece."<sup>2</sup> A note addressed to "friends" warns that as no answer has been given, a second, subscribed petition may be organised.

This next piece, The Second Part of England's New Chains Discovered or a sad Representation of the uncertain and dangerous condition of the Commonwealth, was published in the next month, March. In this Lilburne provided a more detailed analysis of the betrayal of the people, first by the Presbyterians in Parliament, then by the army Grandees. The Levellers have opposed both groups when they realised

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.168.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.169.



their duplicity; Lilburne explains the alliance with the Grandees by Leveller hopes that they would actually perform what they promised. The Leveller negotiators have gone against their own intuition in trying to believe the best of the Grandees, and have waited for them to put the Agreement of the People as revised by the officers into practice, but their late actions leave no doubt of their treachery:

And as time came on, it more and more appeared, that they intended meerly the establishment of themselves in power and greatnesse, without any regard at all to the performance of their promises and engagements, or any respect to the faith and credit of the Army, or to the peace and prosperity of the Common wealth, and that they walked by no rules or principles, either of honesty or conscience; but (as meer pollititians) were governed altogether by occasion, and as they saw a possibility of making progress to their designs, which course of theirs they ever termed a waiting upon providence, that with colour of Religion they might deceive the more securely. 1

Lilburne gives a careful and factual account of the successive steps to power in order to substantiate this charge, concentrating in particular on the way they used, then ruthlessly suppressed, the agitators. Indeed, the Grandees hesitant opportunism, however well intentioned, was an open target for this kind of attack, and Lilburne, with knowledge and experience of them, is able to explain their actions in terms of self interest with some conviction. Any apparent reforms, such as the declaration of the supremacy of the Commons, have been

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.175-76.

devices to clear a way for the new tyranny of a Council of State. Lilburne stresses that the perpetuation of the oppressive taxes to maintain the army will prevent any bettering of the position of the worse off. The Grandees have betrayed the poor people of England who hoped the army would bring them justice.

The two parts of Englands New Chains Discovered are a powerful indictment of the new government, setting out the misdeeds of the Grandees at length, and putting forward Leveller proposals for genuine reforms. Despite Lilburne's bias there was enough truth in the accusations to make the pamphlets widely popular. Lilburne shows more maturity and control in these pamphlets than in much of his earlier writing, and wastes no space. The Council of State took them seriously, and detailed Milton to provide an answer, which, unfortunately for the history of controversy, he never wrote.

(ii) The Hunting of the Foxes

Overton lent satiric talent to the campaign with one of his best pamphlets, The Hunting of the Foxes from Newmarket and Triploe-Heath to Whitehall, By Five small Beagles (late of the Armie). The immediate occasion for this was the cashiering of five soldiers who had petitioned in support of the first part of Englands New Chains Discovered.<sup>1</sup> Overton wrote in their names, another consequence of

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<sup>1</sup> Soldiers had been forbidden to petition unless their requests had been approved by their officers. This was Cromwell's reassertion of his control over the army, and was aimed at the Leveller rank and file.

wishing to speak for the people, but draws a portrait of the Grandees that is distinctively his own. Much of Overton's narrative of the rise of the Grandees is the same as that of Lilburne's pamphlet (which was published after Overton's) but Lilburne was not capable of Overton's caustic power of expression.

Overton describes the hypocritical pretensions to religion in the Grandees with the zest of his Marpriest satires. He professes amazement at their duplicity: "Never were such Saints, such glorious Angels of Light: <sup>h</sup>Paroah's Egyptian Sorcerers were short of these in their Art."<sup>1</sup> Here he treats of their failure to keep their promises:

But this expedient failing them, as to their exorbitant intents, they cast off those robes of Royalty with which they had rendred themselves acceptable with the King's adherents, and laid aside the King and them, finding the way of an Agreement of the People to be much affected and endeavoured after among the Souldiery, they also invest themselves with that Robe, to hide their deformity from the Army; and the better to allay all motions after the same, they confess and acknowledge the excellency and goodness of the premisses, they only find the same unseasonable; and this was drest out in such taking Saint-like language, as the religious people might best be surprised, not suspecting any venemous thing to be lurking under the leaf of their holy and sacred pretences: they call Fasts (a certain fore-runner of mischief with them) cry, and howl, and bedew their cheeks with the tears of hypocrisie and deceit, confess their iniquity and abomination in declining the cause of the people, and tampering with the King; and humbly, as in the presence of the all-seeing God, acknowledge the way of an Agreement of the People, to be the way to our Peace and Freedom; and even then, as soon as they had wiped their eys and their

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfe, Leveller Manifestoes, p.364.

mouths, they proceed even to death, imprisonment or cashierment of all such in the Army as promoted or owned that Agreement. 1

Overton plays on the theme of appearance and reality, continually using the image of clothes to describe the religiosity of the army leaders. Again one of the best attacks on this kind of puritan comes from a radical rather than a Royalist. The execution of some of the Leveller soldiery lends anger to Overton's comment on Cromwell:

"You shall scarce speak to Cromwell about anything, but he will lay his hand upon his breast, elevate his eyes, and call God to record, he will weep, howl and repent, even while he doth smite you under the first rib."<sup>2</sup>

(iii) The Picture of the Council of State

The Council of State could not but react to the deliberate and outspoken challenge of the Levellers, with the threat of civil pressure in London, and mutiny in the army. They took strong action; on March 28, 1649, Lilburne, Overton, Walwyn and Thomas Prince, a merchant prominent in Leveller affairs, were arrested by two hundred troops each in the early morning, Cromwell being determined to risk no failure. After questioning all four were committed to the Tower of London. They lost no time in informing their supporters; early in April appeared The Picture of the Council of State, a joint effort by Lilburne,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.365.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.370.

Overton and Prince.

Lilburne's narrative heads the pamphlet. He makes the most of the disproportionate contrast between the small army sent to arrest him and his unarmed, unsuspecting household. He allows himself a touch of humour at the spectacle of the arrest; "So away through the streets the armed Victors carry us, like three conquered Slaves, making us often halt by the way, that so their men might draw up in good order, to incounter with an Army of Butter-flies, in case they should meet them in the way to rescue us their Captives from them."<sup>1</sup> Before the Council Lilburne refused to answer questions, but argued that it was illegal and had no power to question or to arrest him. Such proceedings, he claimed, were the result of a new tyranny, designed to break the spirits of the people.

Questioned a second time about Englands New Chains, Lilburne angrily protested; "But, Sir, This I will say to you, my late Actions have not bin done in a hole, or a corner, but on the house top, in the face of the Sun, before hundreds and some thousands of people; and therefore why ask you me any questions?"<sup>1</sup> Lilburne threatened to burn down his prison if he was committed to the army instead of to a civil prison, and, looking at Cromwell, declared he had not found enough honour, honesty, justice or conscience in the officers to

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<sup>1</sup> Haller and Davies, Leveller Tracts, p.192.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.202.

trust himself among them: With this gesture of calculated insult this examination is ended. While the Council discussed the case, Lilburne, his ear to the door, heard Cromwell thump the table and speak; "You have no other way to deale with these men, but to breake them in pieces...if you do not break them, they will breake you."<sup>1</sup> Such an exciting climax helps make Lilburne's narrative one of his most gripping.

Prince's account is very brief and factual, but Overton was given a golden opportunity to ridicule the saints of the army. The officer detailed to arrest him, Lieutenant Colonel Axtel, was a member of William Kiffin's Independent congregation, and made a great show of his religion. Axtel appears to have been obsessed with sexual immorality. Overton had been sleeping in the same room as a man and his wife, the wife and her baby in one bed, the two men in the other, as he prints a witness's statement to prove. Axtel arrived as they were finishing dressing, and immediately accused Overton of sleeping with the woman, "one of his wives".<sup>2</sup> The protests of the woman's husband did not prevent Axtel continuing to abuse them. Searching the house, Axtel found a soldier in another room, sleeping with his wife, and promptly arrested him merely for lying with a woman. Getting into his stride, Axtel also declared the landlord's wife and a maid living in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.204.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.215.

the house to be prostitutes, and announced in the street that the place was a brothel, stocked with Overton's whores. Overton tells the story with a lively sense of the ridiculousness of Axtel, not missing the opportunity of hinting something suspect in his interest in sexual immorality. Overton launches from the particular issue to the wider question of the Grantees' pretensions to godliness:

... the Gentleman is become one of the Grantees of the Royall palace: one of the (mock-) Saints in season, now judgeing the Earth, inspired with providence and opportunities at pleasure of their own invention as quick and as nimble as an Hocas Spocas, or a Fiend in a Juglers Box, they are not flesh and bloud, as are the wicked, they are all spirituall, all heavenly, the pure Camelions of the time, they are this or that or what you please, in a trice, in a twinkling of an eye; there is no form, no shape that you can fancy among men, into which their Spirituallities are not changeable at pleasure; but for the most part, these holy men present themselves in the perfect figure of Angels of light, of so artificiall resemblance, enough to deceive the very Elect if possible, that when they are entered their Sanctum Sanctorum, their holy convocation at White-hall, they seem no other than a quire of Arch-Angels, of Cherubins and Seraphims, chanting their fals-holy Halelujaes of victory over the people, having put all principalities and powers under their feet, and the Kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the Kingdom is theirs, and all Dominions, even all the people shall serve and obey them...and now these men of Jerusalem as I may term them those painted Sepulchers of Sion after their long conjuring together of providences, opportunities and seasons one after another, drest out to the people in the sacred shape of Gods Time, (as after the language of their new fangled Saint-ships I may speak it) they have brought their seasons to perfection, even to the Season of Seasons, now to rest themselves in the large and full enjoyment of the creature for a time, two times and half a time, resolving now to ware out the true asserters of the peoples freedom, and to change the



time and laws to their exorbitant ambition and will. 1

This is a scathing parody in biblical language of the Grandees conception of themselves and of providence; Overton jeers at the way they make the Scriptures serve their own ends and varnish over their ambition. The analogy of a conjuror attributes to them a highly professional, deliberate kind of trickery. This portrait completes the series I have quoted to show Overton's satiric interest in religious hypocrisy.

(iv) The Leveller - Independent break

At this time occurred the final split in the uneasy alliance between the Levellers and the Independent Churches, which hostility to the Presbyterians had kept in being. The Grandees satisfied the Independent Churches in religion, giving them a privileged position of influence, which they were naturally not prepared to risk by association with the Levellers. From 1647 the Levellers had found them blowing cold but Englands New Chains proved the final instrument of division; the Independents wanted nothing to do with it, and refused to read it in their congregations. Walwyn, the man most concerned with the Independents in raising petitions together, had taken no part in Englands New Chains; Lilburne was surprised to see him arrested with the others in March. He now came to the help of his friends with one of his best pamphlets, attacking the wealthy Independent congregations.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.218-219.

The Vanitie of the Present Churches was published in March, and in it Walwyn analyses the fall from grace of the different Churches during the Civil War, parallel to the betrayal of the people by the equivalent governments that formed the subject of Lilburne's and Overton's writings. The Independents have gone the same way as the Bishops and the Presbyterians, corrupted by the power they have obtained. The erstwhile allies of the people's cause now hanker after persecution in religion,<sup>1</sup> and resort to slander and personal vilification against those that cannot share their views.

Walwyn sees the root of this disaster in the Independents' exclusive claim to preach the word of God, and assumption of divine inspiration for their actions. Their ministers have become a priestly caste, and know well how to make a livelihood of their religion. The statesmen of the world are always ready to ally themselves with such ministers in order to control the people; Walwyn hints at the solidarity between the Grandees and the Independents. The truth can be read in the Scriptures by simple honest men, and it could lead them to do practical good, turning their attention to the evil in civil affairs, relieving the poor, and freeing the commonwealth from oppressors. This is the nearest Walwyn gets to an explicitly Leveller

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<sup>1</sup> In the Leveller negotiations with representatives of the Independents and Grandees, Ireton and the Levellers had disagreed on whether the state could punish even blasphemers, or Papists only for religious opinions.

statement in this pamphlet. He urges the Independents and sects to sympathise with those who do not share their religious convictions, and seek other means of unifying the state:

... we wish with all our soules that all reproach, despites and envyings amongst men might for ever cease, and that difference in judgement, may no longer occasion difference in affection; there being in our apprehension no cause at all; but that all men going in their severall wayes of serving God, whether publique or private, may neverthelesse be free to communicate in all civill Offices of love and true friendship, and cordially joyne with any, for a publique good... 1

Walwyn's thoughtful advice, cast in a quieter and less contentious mode, provided covert support for the parallel pamphlets of Lilburne and Overton. He was farsighted in urging civil policy rather than religion to unify England, but the initiative was passing from the advocates of reason and democracy to the fanatics; the inheritors of many of the Leveller reforms would be the Fifth Monarchists. However his analysis of an important strain of English puritanism was prophetic; the Independent churches preserved themselves as exclusive, inward looking groups, and as the Leveller predicted, they fell unlamented.

Immediately after the arrest of the four Levellers, the Independent ministers demonstrated their approval of the Council of State's action by a petition dissociating themselves from their former allies, whom they denounced as firebrand extremists. Walwyn had not

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.274.

joined in The Picture of the Council of State, in keeping with his retirement from the party meetings. The petition, however, brought him back into line with his fellows, for whom in collaboration he penned A Manifestation From Lieutenant Col. John Lilburne, Mr. William Walwyn, Mr. Thomas Prince, and Mr. Richard Overton. In this he refutes general slanders being spread about the Levellers, denying that they are communists, anarchists or lovers of disorder. Walwyn's insidious irony can be detected in the calm and easy refutation of these charges; "Tis somewhat a strange consequence to infer that because we have laboured so earnestly for a good Government, therefore we would have none at all, Because we would have the dead and exorbitant Branches pruned, and better sciens grafted, therefore we would pluck the Tree up by the roots."<sup>1</sup> He hopes that he need produce no evidence to prove they are no Royalists, but points out in reply to the charge that they are Jesuits, Prynne's favourite accusation, that all four of them are married. Neither are they atheists. Walwyn stresses that the fear that no-one knows where they will stop is unfounded; they will state their position yet again. A Manifestation is an efficient pamphlet; Walwyn's air of mild reason, which Lilburne and Overton could not attain, suits the defence of the practicality of the Leveller proposals and the denial of extremism.

The Independent ministers were not long in stepping up their

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.280.

attack on the Leveller leaders. From 1645 they had been suspicious of Walwyn's brand of Christianity, and it was through his character that they attacked the Leveller party, representing it as his brainchild. A group of ministers had been collecting slander about him for some years, and thought the time ripe for its release.

Walwins Wiles, or, The Manifestors Manifested (May 1649), was a comprehensive denigration of his personal character and his ideas.

A Manifestation, which they detected as Walwyn's work, infuriated them especially; here is one of their better passages, on its style, an unusual piece of literary criticism:

We have of late observed several expresses from three of these Manifestators so qualified, as if written by the chief Secretaries of the Prince of Slanders, through whose lines, as through a prison-grate, such a distempered, furious, rayling and raging spirit doth stare and gaze their sober and judicious Readers in the face, spitting such venom, ranker and mallice against the most pious and deserving men of this Nation, that they cannot do such homage to Belzebub, the Prince of such Spirits as to hear the sound of his revengeful and envious language, and to waste their time in reading such slanderous Declarations from his infernal Court; but behold a fresh appearance of these subscribers in a new dress of a latter date, as if that spirit would shew his master peece, in his crafty translation of himself into the form of an Angel of light, calling it self by the name of a Manifestation of L.C. John Lilburn, Mr. William Walwyn &c. bearing date the 14 of April, 1649. whose devout, specious, meek, self denying, soft and pleasant lips savours much of the sligh, cunning and close subtlety of that additional Subscriber, Mr. William Walwyn, who (as the Serpent that deceived our first Parents was more subtle then any beast of the field which the Lord God had made) is much more crafty then the rest of his brethren, of whose curious spinning we have several reasons to presume this piece, for here

is not the licentious-provoking daringness of L.Col.  
Lilburns pen, nor yet the notorious profanness of  
Mr. Richard Overtons pen. 1

The Ministers' language is hyperbolic and loaded with adjectives, their tone sanctimonious. They picture Walwyn as the eminence grise of the party, who has deceived Lilburne, a genuine but misguided saint, into his present evil course - there were personal friends of Lilburne among the ministers. Walwyn is a devil, motivated by the desire to destroy mens' souls, and overturn all order; he can corrupt men of unusual ability by his insinuating conversation. Numerous instances, some trivial, some more serious, are recounted to substantiate this; one is that he persuaded a woman to commit suicide (in reply he called her family to witness that he had visited her to cheer her in her persistent severe depression). Apart from the attack on Walwyn, the ministers express full support for the Grandees, glorying in the way God has favoured them with success.

Another attack on the Levellers, this time on more general lines, was published by the Council of State. It was entitled The Discoverer, (June, 1649) and was written by Walter Frost and John Canne, a Baptist preacher. This combines some sensible points from A Declaration of Some Proceedings with the familiar accusations of anarchy and communism. The authors invented a new tactic to substantiate the charge of communism; they cited communist arguments from Gerrard Winstanley's

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.291-292.

"Digger" pamphlets claiming them to be Leveller works. The dishonesty of the authors enabled them to exaggerate and falsify even Winstanley's views, as when they state that the Levellers do not believe in Christ or in the scriptures. The pamphlet is written in a dull and heavy style, and has little interest apart from this manoeuvre.

Walwyn replied to the rumours being circulated about the Leveller leaders, and to Walwins Wiles, just before The Discoverer was published. As usual he analysed his opponents' characters as well as replying to specific allegations. In The Fountain of Slaunder Discovered (1649) Walwyn is at his most embittered, in a different mood from that in which he replied to Edwards. After his long work organising petitions for toleration, he had expected better treatment. The character he describes is that of the "politician": the Independent minister and the army Grandee. The politician is a hypocrite who uses slander to advance his corrupt ends, as only by discrediting his opponent's personality can he withstand rational criticism. This accounts for the rumours spread about the Leveller leaders. Again the Independents are following in the path blazed by the Presbyterians. Then Walwyn gives an extended description of the politician:

.... the Politicians chief Agent is his tongue, wherewith in an evil sense, and to an evil end, he speaks to every man in his own language, applies himself to every mans corrupt humour and interest, by it he becomes all things to all men, that by all means he might deceive some.



And whom by flattery and delusion he gains not, by slander he labours to destroy; his brain is the forge of mischief, the Fountain of Slander, and his tongue set on fire of hel (as Saint James speaks).

Yet his words are cool as the dew, smooth as oyl, and sweet as the purest honey, weeps and kils, smiles and stobs, praieth, fasteth, and sometimes preacheth to betray, shrouds himself under the finest cloak of Religion, takes on him the most zealous forme of godlinesse, and in this shape securely casts his nets to catch plain-meaning people.

Very Religious in shew; but very covetous in deed, given to usury and oppressive gain, can possesse the worlds goods in abundance, yet suffer their Brethren to lack necessaries, yea, to lie and starve in prisons through penury and hunger: they can be clothed, as in purple, and fare deliciously every day, but poor Joseph's and Lazarus's tears and cries are despised by them: Seemingly humble, but upon advantage, none more violent, imperious, inhumane, or bloud-thirsty than they: obstructors of justice, and all good things, neither doing it themselves, nor permitting others.

In a word, observe them well, and you shall see Christ and Belial, God and Mammon in one and the same person; Christ is shew, the other in reality... 1

This portrait is similar to Overton's; Walwyn here joins him and Lilburne in agreeing with their despairing vision of a sharp division between the good and evil. He does not forget to include in his indictment the treatment of the poor, always his concern. His mood is sadder than that of his fellows, and his tone is quieter as he recognises the supremacy of corrupt self-interest over the reasonableness that he had tried to personify.

Walwyn also found it necessary to reply in more detail to Walwins Wiles, which he did in Walwyn's Just Defence (1649). I shall not deal

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<sup>1</sup> The Fountain of Slaunder Discovered, (1649) p.25-26.

with this pamphlet, because much of it is detailed refutation of trivia, and much narrative of his part in organising petitions, which I have already mentioned. He fulfilled his threat to name the Independents he dealt with, and concentrated on showing exactly how the spies had either pretended or betrayed friendship with him in order to acquire the scandal they passed on to the ministers; several histories portrayed the unpleasant self righteousness of the slanderers even when their lies were detected. The ministers had been his friends and worked with him, and never reproved him for the faults they had just revealed. Walwyn puts flesh on the bones of his portrait of the politician in this pamphlet, ending with an account of some of the leading Independents, so saintly to the world, telling dirty jokes in their homes.

(v) The End of Leveller Journalism

The Leveller press campaign was accompanied by mutinies in the army and civil demonstrations in London during April and May. In April, Robert Lockyer, a Leveller trooper executed by Cromwell was accorded perhaps the most impressive funeral of the Civil War. A mutiny of 600 men in May needed the presence of Cromwell and Fairfax to crush it at Burford. Unfortunately for the Levellers, they had no other way of using their support, and the mutinies appear to have been spontaneous and uncoordinated. Lilburne was never tempted by armed rebellion, and denied any complicity, though he approved of the soldiers' cause and resolution. The Levellers were a defeated party.

Walwyn's Just Defence has the air of being Walwyn's definitive apology. It was also his farewell to politics, as the only other pamphlet he is known to have written is a short one on juries. Overton published two unimportant pamphlets in July 1649, calling for action from the Leveller rank and file. After this he too dropped from the scene. Cromwell's repression effectively ended the party and silenced all except Lilburne. At the height of his personal popularity, thanks to general discontent at Cromwell's government, he struck the last important blow in the 1649 press campaign, with Legall Fundamental Liberties, published in June from the Tower, which contained his defence against The Discoverer and Walwins Wiles, with more condemnation of the Rump and Council of State. Half is taken up with the story of his life, designed to show his consistency and acquit him from the accusation of being a troublemaker. Each time he has brushed with authority it has been on a vital matter of principle, and each time he has been proved right by events. His life has been a series of betrayals of both him and their own principles by his familiar friends, the greatest of whom is Cromwell. Lilburne gives his audience the last instalment of their party's, and his own story, telling of the negotiations of December 1648 and the press campaign of 1649. In this pamphlet Lilburne shows himself mature and considered, a man much changed since the beginning of his political career. At the end he promises a second part to answer The Discoverer further, and give more details of the events of 1649.

This second part was never to materialise. As the party disintegrated, (Overton and Walwyn disappearing with it when released later in the year), Lilburne remained alone facing Cromwell's increasingly stable government. He had eight more years of life, and several personal triumphs still to come, but despite such flashes as a petition for his release signed by nearly 100,000 people later in the year, henceforth he fought for himself rather than for a party. At his trial in October he scored a resounding success, being acquitted after a brilliant defence, against all expectation. At the verdict he was noticed to look more despondent than delighted; perhaps he realised that the triumph was now merely his alone, not that of the Levellers. His pamphleteering, always dependent on the support it received, showed a decline. He never wrote the second part to Legall Fundamental Liberties, and his last major effort of 1649, an attack on Cromwell, never got beyond a disappointing and introductory first part. He continued writing, but his work tended to be more of personal than general interest. His personal popularity remained high, as a second trial and acquittal showed in 1653, after which Cromwell satisfied his fear of Lilburne by imprisoning him on the Isle of Wight for the rest of his life; he knew better than to use the Tower.

Lilburne's last pamphlet of political interest is his swan song of 1653, The Just Defence of John Lilburne against Such as charge him with Turbulency of Spirit, which states again with great dignity his

lifelong struggle: "There being not one particular I have contended for, and for which I have suffered, but the right, freedome, safety, and well-being of every particular man, woman, and child in England hath been so highly concerned therein, that their freedome or bondage hath depended thereupon."<sup>1</sup> He ends the pamphlet with a new note, a confession that his temperament had made him prone to lose his temper. An ageing Lilburne speaks, using his familiar Bible in one of his last apologies to his public:

Frailties and infirmities I have, and thick and threefold have been my provocations; he that hath not failed in his tongue, is perfect, so am not I. I dare not say, Lord I am not as other men; but, Lord be merciful to me a sinner; But I have been hunted like a Partridge upon the mountains: My words and actions in the times of my trials and deepest distress and danger have been scanned with the spirit of Jobs comforters; but yet I knowe I have to do with a gracious God, I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he will bring light out of this darkeness, and cleer my innocency to all the world. 2

### I. Conclusion

The Levellers created a new kind of party, and with it a new kind of political journalism. They changed the emphasis of their demands from religion to secular politics, seeing a new form of government rather than a new Church as the best way of attaining the stability and unity that the Civil War had shattered. The Levellers appealed

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<sup>1</sup> Haller and Davies, Leveller Tracts, p.453.

<sup>2</sup> Haller and Davies, Leveller Tracts, p.464.

to readers who had never previously played a part in England's political life, asserting that every free man should have a voice in the election of his governors. This democratic ideal necessitated a politically aware and active electorate, and this the Levellers hoped to produce by their pamphlets and their party organisation. The party enabled petitions to be organised, pamphlets to be printed and distributed not only around London, but also among the regiments of the New Model Army. With a party behind them, the Leveller pamphleteers' claim to speak for the people could not be easily brushed aside.

The Leveller pamphleteers believed that the common people would be convinced by reason of their true interest, which they tried to state to them as clearly and practically as possible. John Lilburne found that the interest and sympathy gained by a puritan martyrdom could be evoked equally successfully in the cause of an appeal for reform in the state. He dramatised his aims in his clashes with authority, which he recreated for his readers in his pamphlets, where narrative jostled with political theory, denunciation, and appeals for support. He invited his readers to identify with him and join in the struggle for England's liberties and freedoms. Lilburne's style was usually simple and forcible, and despite his conventionally cumbersome sentences, readily comprehensible to the literate. Lilburne combined the roles of leader and pamphleteer; he was a man of



sufficient stature to make his identification of his own wrongs with England's grievances plausible. Without the writings of Lilburne the Leveller party would have been inconceivable.

The pamphleteering of Lilburne was complemented by the work of Richard Overton and William Walwyn, both more deliberate and self-conscious writers than the arch-Leveller. Both were able to throw new light on the problems Lilburne raised, and to articulate his and their ideas in a more organised and coherent form. Walwyn tempered the heat of Lilburne with quiet, mild-mannered reason, stressing the practicality of Leveller aims, and analysing the bitter opposition they aroused. Walwyn's writings, with their gentle irony and delicate humour, personified the very charity and rationality he urged.

Besides his ability to theorise on the principles of Leveller action, Richard Overton brought the talents of a satirist to the Leveller cause. His portraits of the Presbyterians and the Independent Grandees are savage, colourful and attractive, showing his lively sense of humour. Overton had the detachment and skill to make use of various literary devices; this shows in the Marpriest series and when he spoke for the "people" in A Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens. Of the three writers, Overton had the most in common with the literary figures involved in political journalism that I deal with in the other chapters of this thesis.

Extremely important in the work of all three Leveller pamphleteers was a quality which they shared with Marprelate, the impression of



individual personality that each could give to his pamphlets. Lilburne gave this a new twist by the way in which he used his own name and reputation; he could express in print his dynamic and attractive character so completely that he might almost have been talking to each reader. This was his principal gift and perhaps no other political writer can compare with him in it. Walwyn also conveyed his own character, though with a more sophisticated and deliberate artistry; if less powerful than Lilburne's it was equally clearly defined, and more subtle and thought provoking. Overton too could speak in his own person, but he was happier with a character created by his literary ability, or at least when not writing directly about himself. The prominence given to their own names and personalities by the Leveller pamphleteers set an important precedent in political journalism.

The Leveller pamphleteers developed the press to reach a wide audience and persuade them to action more brilliantly than any other group of writers of the Civil War and Interregnum. The Levellers foreshadowed much later development both in their aims and methods, but in their own time their achievement was to remain isolated, and they were soon to be forgotten. Political journalism was to run in other channels than the ones the Leveller pamphleteers had created for it, both in the Interregnum and after the Restoration.

CHAPTER THREEA NOTE ON THE POLITICAL WRITINGS OF JOHN MILTON

The prose writings of Milton have been thoroughly dealt with by both literary historian and critic. My aim in this brief note is to illustrate further the nature of political pamphleteering and different criteria that it must be judged by, through discussing the difficulties that beset Milton when he turned to prose controversy. From the first his pamphlets showed his immense literary ability, but it was nearly a decade before they became really effective in actual politics. The comparison with the Levellers is relevant here; though they lacked Milton's talent, they were far more successful in imposing their own ideas on the political situation.

In 1654 Milton gave this account of his entry into political journalism:

Meanwhile, as Parliament acted with vigor, the haughtiness of the bishops began to deflate. As soon as freedom of speech (at the very least) became possible, all mouths were opened against them. Some complained of the personal defects of the bishops, others of the defectiveness of the episcopal rank itself. It was wrong, they said, that their church alone should differ from all other reformed churches. It was proper for the church to be governed by the example of the brethren, but first of all by the word of God. Now, thoroughly aroused by these concerns, I perceived that men were following the true path to liberty and that from these beginnings, these first steps, they were making the most direct progress towards the liberation of all human life from slavery - provided that the discipline arising from religion should overflow into the morals and institutions of the state. Since, moreover, I had so practiced

myself from youth that I was above all things unable to disregard the laws of God and man, and since I had asked myself whether I should be of any future use if I now failed my country (or rather the church and so many of my brothers who were exposing themselves to danger for the sake of the Gospel) I decided, although at that time occupied with certain other matters, to devote to this conflict all my talents and my active powers. 1

The arguments for and against episcopacy had not moved far since the time of Cartwright, Whitgift and Hooker, and were still grounded in the scriptural and historical evidence for episcopacy. The principal apologists for the bishops were at this point Bishops Hall and Usher. Hall had published Episcopacy by Divine Right Asserted in 1640 and a shorter, simpler, and more moderate plea for episcopacy, aimed at a wider audience, in 1641. It was written in an easy, elegant style, and entitled An Humble Remonstrance to the High Court of Parliament. Five eminent puritan divines, using the pseudonym Smectymnuus, replied advocating a Presbyterian system of church government. One of them, Thomas Young, had been Milton's tutor.<sup>2</sup> They used the technique of scholarly scriptural argument, without emotional appeal, that had been the mode of the more conservative of their Elizabethan predecessors. To the reader today it seems strange

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<sup>1</sup> Second Defence of the English People. Complete Prose Works of John Milton. (Newhaven, Yale University Press, Vols.I-IV, 1953-1966) IV, Pt.I, 621-622.

<sup>2</sup> The others were Edmund Calamy, Stephen Marshall, Matthew Newcomen and William Spurstowe. Their initials form 'Smectymnuus'.

that at the start of such an explosive expansion of puritanism its "official" controversialists should be so banal and stereotyped.

Milton hoping for a golden age of reformation, felt a similar distaste for this manner, which however did not allow him to sidestep altogether the learned arguments of the defenders of episcopacy.

Later he voiced his reluctance to take part;

... put from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightfull studies to come into the dim reflexion of hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk, and there be fain to club quotations with men whose learning and beleif lies in marginal stuffings, who when they have like good sumpters laid ye down their hors load of citations and fathers at your dore, with a rapsody of who and who were the Bishops here or there, ye may take off their packsaddles, their days work is don, and episcopacy, as they think, stoutly vindicated. 1

Milton's first pamphlet, Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England and the Causes that hitherto have hindred it (June 1641)

attempted a general survey of the problem of reformation in the church, coinciding with the dispute between Hall and the Smectymnuans.

The pamphlet can be summarised briefly. Milton starts with a contrast between the inward sincerity of true religion, and the outward formality of prelacy, exemplified in its hierarchy and ceremonies, which the coming reformation must abolish. England enjoys a special place in God's plans for reformation, and is destined to develop the most perfect Church. Milton does not explain the discipline he advises,

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<sup>1</sup> The Reason of Church Government Urg'd against Prelaty. Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I, 821-2.

but implies that it is Presbyterian.<sup>1</sup> He continues with the causes that have hindered the discipline in England, giving a brief and biased history of the bishops' meddling in politics, always compliant to the will of the King. The opposers of reformation are likely to be either antiquarians, libertines, or politicians. First Milton tackles the antiquarians, who rely on testimonies of the fathers and councils to prove the divine origin of episcopacy. He tries to show that a true primitive bishop had no revenue or fixed diocese, then discredits antiquity altogether, particularly attacking Constantine, who had given the church temporal possessions. The fathers are contradictory, unreliable and confused. Milton produces quotations from Dante, Petrarch and Ariosto to enhance his case. Without paying much attention to the libertine, who merely hates the restraint of his vices, Milton moves in the second part of his pamphlet to refute the politician. He wishes to prove that bishops both encroach on the just preserves of monarchy and also encourage Kings to become absolute. He denies that the bishops give any support to monarchy as it is understood in England; 'No bishop, No King' is only a politic device of the bishops, designed to make them attractive to the Kings on whom they depend. Milton heaps exaggerated opprobrium on the bishops, picturing them as monsters of worldliness and greed, eager to destroy

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<sup>1</sup> At this point a kind of Presbyterian system was generally assumed to be the object of the reformers.

the nation's liberties and effeminate its youth. He brings in many grievances against them, such as the ecclesiastical courts and the railing in of the communion table. Milton envisages himself telling posterity of the deeds of reformation approaching, in a 'heroic song' and ends with an invocation to God that contrasts the contemporary saints prospect of heaven with the bishops' prospect in hell.

In this pamphlet Milton handles his learning in a more opportunist manner than the Smectymnuans. Though he felt that the fathers could not be neglected, he had no intention of scrupulously weighing their testimony; he was to discredit them altogether in his next pamphlet, Of Prelatical Episcopacy. He shows an artistic or rhetorical attitude to documentary proof, remarking; "I will not run into a paroxysm of citations again in this point."<sup>1</sup> This attitude contrasts with that of a popular controversialist such as "Marginal" Prynne, who prided himself on the size of his lists of authorities.

The famous opening paragraph of Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England<sup>2</sup> illustrates the difference between Milton's style and that of Smectymnuus. Milton's tone is that of the orator deliberately rising to the occasion. The complex sentence-structure and the elaborate similes of the passage have only a distant connection with ordinary speech; Milton is pressing his powers of vigorous and

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I, 566.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.519-522.

original expression into the service of reform, to make the contrast between inward and outward devotion. The sheer creative power of such an image as Milton's of the soul as a bird shows a talent possessed by no other pamphleteer of the period. Yet if the effect of Milton's prose in this pamphlet can sometimes be overpowering, the huge sentences can also be confusing with their many clauses and distortion of the normal rhythms of speech.

The outright hostility to the bishops and the elaborate violence with which it is expressed distinguishes Milton's pamphlet from those of the Presbyterian ministers.<sup>1</sup> He describes Roman Catholicism as "the new-vomited Paganisme of sensuall Idolatry,"<sup>2</sup> and throughout uses what he considers the most potent images, regardless of their origin:

And it is still Episcopacie that before all our eyes worsens and slugs the most learned, and seeming religious of our Ministers, who no sooner advanc't to it, but like a seething pot set to coole, sensibly exhale and reake out the greatest part of that zeale, and those Gifts which were formerly in them, settling in a skinny congealment of ease and sloth at the top; and if they keep their Learning by some potent sway of Nature, 'tis a rare chance; but their devotion most commonly comes to that queasy temper of luke-warmnesse, that gives a Vomit to God himselfe. 3

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<sup>1</sup> There were a number of satirical pamphlets and broadsides current at this time, attacking both bishops and sects, often very scurrilous and violent. See Introduction, The Complete Works of John Milton, I, 131-32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.520.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.536-537.



Milton comments on the moving of the communion table:

... the Table of Communion now become a Table of separation stands like an exalted platforme upon the brow of the quire, fortifi'd with bulwark, and barricado, to keep off the profane touch of the Laicks, whilst the obscene, and surfeted Priest scruples not to paw, and mammock the sacramentall bread, as familiarly as his Tavern Bisket. 1

There is no lack of polemic impetus in Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England. Milton is at perpetual boiling point in his long and weighty invectives against the bishops. Impressive though this energy is, the pictures his language creates tend to lose contact with political reality. In the following passage Milton refers to the church ornaments and ceremonies enforced by Laud, his indictment borders on fantasy:

What can we suppose this will come to? What other materials then these have built up the spirituall BABEL to the height of her Abominations? Beleeve it Sir right truly it may be said, that Antichrist is Mammons Son. The soure levin of humane Traditions mixt in one putrifi'd Masse with the poisonous dregs of hypocrisie in the hearts of Prelates that lye basking in the Sunny warmth of Wealth, and Promotion, is the Serpents Egge that will hatch an Antichrist wheresoever, and ingender the same Monster as big, or little as the Lump is which breeds him. If the splendor of Gold and Silver begin to Lord it once againe in the Church of England, wee shall see Antichrist shortly wallow heere, though his cheife Kennell be at Rome. 2

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.547-548.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.590.

Particularly liable to this charge is the prayer to God at the end of the pamphlet, where Milton makes his strongest effort to rise to the grandeur of his theme. This fervent appeal for reformation interpreted, in Milton's manner, the feelings of many puritans that they were witnessing the fruition of God's plans for the Church, but it sacrificed a cool assessment of the political scene in the process; at its end the bishops are pictured,

... thrown downe eternally into the darkest and deepest Gulfe of HELL, where under the despightfull controule, the trample and spurne of all the other Damned, that in the anguish of their Torture shall have no other ease then to exercise a Raving and Bestiall Tyranny over them as their Slaves and Negro's, they shall remaine in that plight for ever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot and downe-trodden Vassals of Perdition. 1

J.W. Allen comments on this prayer; "It was not of the actual world that he was then writing, but of one that existed in his imagination alone...this passage involves an almost grotesque distortion of the actualities of the moment."<sup>2</sup> One should perhaps qualify this statement; though Milton's vision of the bishops was unique, his emotionally charged hate of them reflects that of an important segment of puritan opinion, and can be paralleled in the work of Prynne and Lilburne's A Worke of the Beast. It is Milton's manner of expressing

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.616-617.

<sup>2</sup> English Political Thought, 1603-60. (London, 1938), Vol.I, p.334-336.

his feelings that makes his pamphlet so different from such writers.

Milton marked Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England as a personal idiosyncratic production in other ways than by his language. He had no diffidence in introducing quotations from his favourite authors, including Dante, Petrarch and Ariosto. That most puritans would not share his love of letters, but would regard such authors as Popish, and probably frivolous, does not appear to have troubled him. His own poetic ambitions make an appearance towards the end of the final invocation in a manner which seems of purely personal relevance; if the hint that the author might become a national poet was calculated to impress many of the readers of the puritan pamphlets of 1641, Milton was under a misapprehension.

For all its force and insistence Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England achieved no notoriety, and probably few readers. William Haller's exhaustive researches have shown that none of Milton's anti-prelatical tracts had anything like the impact of Hall or Smectymnuus.<sup>1</sup> His explanation is that Milton did not make himself the representative of any sectional group, but wrote purely on his own account and for reformation in general; his Presbyterianism sat lightly on him. Further, Milton does not seem to me to have a clear audience in mind. The choice of the pamphlet form suggests the attempt to reach a fairly wide audience, which the avoidance of the narrowly

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix B, Tracts on Liberty, I, 128-139.

scholarly controversy confirms. Milton is preaching to the converted, expecting his readers to share the initial easy assumption of the evils of episcopacy, whipping up enthusiasm with emotional appeals to anti-clerical and anti-Papal feeling. Yet the highly individual style and frequent literary allusions might have been expected to alienate the puritan accustomed to traditional controversy. In a later pamphlet<sup>1</sup> Milton stated that one reason he had for writing the anti-prelatical tracts was that he felt it a duty to witness to the truth, so that he could share in the joys of the coming reformation. What he did was to express his highly individual views in as persuasive a manner<sup>as</sup> possible and it was not surprising that his word did not achieve instant popularity. Unlike Lilburne or Prynne he had no personal knowledge of politics or of the pamphlet-reading citizens, but was still a retiring student. Yet compared to Smectymnus Milton was more sensitive to the changing mood of the age, and tried to reflect it in his pamphlet. Paradoxically, though Of Reformation bore too individual a stamp to win popularity at the time, we can now recognise how in parts of the tract, Milton's literary power enabled him to voice most clearly the feeling of the dawning of a new age that he shared with so many puritan contemporaries.

The ingredients of Of Reformation are to be found, in varying

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<sup>1</sup> The Reason of Church Government Urg'd against Prelaty, The Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I, 804-806.

mixtures, in Milton's other anti-prelatical tracts, which I shall not discuss in detail. Of Prelatical Episcopacy, a reply to Ussher's publication, The Judgement of Dr. Rainoldes, was devoted to discrediting the fathers' testimony on episcopacy. Despite the obvious learning displayed, J. Max Patrick has remarked:

The greatness of Milton's tract lies less in his scholarship and reasoning than in his brilliant debating. Although he chose to be no more exact in method than as the citations of his opponents led him, he utilized almost all the rhetorical skills and devices of classical oratory ... He was attempting to address a wider public than the erudite theologians and scholars to whom Ussher's pamphlet would have appealed. <sup>1</sup>

It lacks some of the excesses of its predecessor. The fourth anti-prelatical tract, The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelacy is less polemic, a quieter exposition of Milton's ideas on the church. A long digression on Milton's poetic ambitions at the beginning of the second part has a bearing on his conception of his readers; "...although I would be heard only, if it might be, by the elegant & learned reader, to whom principally for a while I shal beg leav I may addresse my selfe."<sup>2</sup> This shows that Milton expected other readers than those who could appreciate a discussion of the possibilities of the tragedy, ode and epic in the vernacular. This pamphlet is the

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I, 619.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.807.

first Milton signed, and he felt the need to describe himself and give his readers some promise of what he had in store for them, as well as testifying his support for the new forces in religion. In these tracts he declares his confidence in the judgement of the unlearned artisan in basic matters of religion. We cannot tell whether Milton envisaged any of his kind among his readers as well as the "elegant and learned".

Milton also directly seconded the Smectymuans in their controversy with Bishop Hall, which was growing more acrimonious at each exchange. His pamphlet Animadversions Upon the Remonstrants Defence Against Smectymnuus. Hall, known as the "English Seneca", had a reputation both for introducing the "Senecan" style with its shorter sentences and compressed antithesis into English prose,<sup>1</sup> and for writing the first vernacular verse satires. His wit and polish contrasted with the plain style of his adversaries, in Milton's eyes to the latter's disadvantage:

...when I saw his weake arguments headed with sharpe taunts, and that his designe was, if he could not refute them, yet at least with quips and snapping adagies to vapour them out, which they bent only upon the businesse were minded to let passe, by how much I saw them taking little thought for their own injuries, I must confess I took it as my part the less to endure that my respected friends through their own unnecessary patience should thus lye at the mercy of a coy flurting stile; to be girded with

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<sup>1</sup> See George Williamson, The Senecan Amble (Chicago, 1951)

frumps and curtall gibes, by one who makes sentences  
by the Statute, as if all above three inches long  
were confiscat. <sup>1</sup>

To counter this adversary, whose literary ability he recognised if despised, Milton adopts the form of quoting a passage from Hall, then answering or ridiculing it. Realising that the humour and vehemence of his invective, which brought new bitterness into the controversy, would need explanation, he attempts to justify his method in a preface. Milton gives in excuse Hall's "voluble and smart fluence of tongue" which inspires his work with groundless confidence, and demands deflation; "I suppose and more then suppose, it will be nothing disagreeing from Christian meeknesse to handle such a one in a rougher accent, and to send home his haughtinesse well bespurred with his owne holy-water."<sup>2</sup> He pleads the cause of "grim laughter" and "lowring smile" in the service of truth; "...for even this veine of laughing, (as I could produce out of grave Authors) hath oft-times a strong and sinewy force in teaching and confuting."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An Apology against a Pamphlet Call'd A Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus, Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I, 872-73.

<sup>2</sup> Animadversions Upon the Remonstrants Defence Against Smectymnuus. Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I, 662.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.663.



Milton cannot be accused of levity in his humorous sallies.

Here he answers one of Hall's taunts:

Remon. If you can yet blush.

Answ. This is a more Edomitish conceit than the former, and must be silenc'd with a counter quip of the same countrey. So often and so unsavourily has it been repeated, that the Reader may well cry Downe with it, downe with it for shame. A man would thinke you had eaten over liberally of Esau's red porrage, and from thence dream continually of blushing; or, perhaps, to heighten your fancy in writing, are wont to sit in your Doctors scarlet, which through your eyes infecting your pregnant imaginative with a red suffusion, begets a continuall thought of blushing. That you thus persecute ingenuous men over all your booke, with this one over-tir'd rubricall conceit still of blushing; but if you have no mercy upon them, yet spare your self, lest you bejade the good galloway, your owne opiniaster wit, and make the very conceit it selfe blush with spur-galling. 1

Humour was not Milton's strength, and this type of wit was to wait for Marvell to enliven it. But what he lacks in wit he makes up in violence. After Hall's praise of the Church of England's ministers, Milton responds, "Ha Ha Ha". The bishops are told to "Wipe your fat corpulencies out of our light."<sup>2</sup> Hall is advised that his reply has not left Smectymnuus unaffected; "For certaine your confutation hath atchiev'd nothing against it, and left nothing upon it, but a foule taste of your skillet foot, and a more perfect and distinguishable

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.725.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.726 & 732.

odour of your socks, then of your nightcap."<sup>1</sup> We owe this in part to Milton's feeling that scurrility was an essential part of forceful controversy, but it also reflects both his own indignation at Hall's tactics and the increasing popular hatred for the bishops, to be seen in the rioting around the Commons late in 1641. Again, like Prynne and the authors of a number of scurrilous but important tracts, Milton was not insensitive to the mood that was soon to make episcopacy an academic question.

Milton's last anti-prelatical tract was occasioned by A Modest Confutation of a Slandorous and Scurrilous Libell, Entitled Animadversions etc. (1642), probably written by Hall or his son. Its author retorted Milton's abuse, drawing a portrait of him as a frequenter of ale houses and brothels, more a criticism of his methods than a biography. To vindicate himself Milton published An Apology against a Pamphlet call'd A Modest Confutation; he took the scandalous portrait of himself seriously, and refuted it with another account of his education and life, dilating on his love of sobriety and chastity. Milton ridicules Hall's Latin prose satire, Mundus Alter et Idem and his Toothlesse Satyrs, sometimes wittily, more often ponderously. He does not change his tone; Hall's feet are not forgotten: "...if he would needs put his foot to such a sweaty service, the odour of his

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.733.

Sock was like to be neither musk, nor benjamin?"<sup>1</sup> The style of A Modest Confutation is criticised for, among other things, its short sentences: "instead of well siz'd periods, he greets us with a quantity of thum-ring posies."<sup>2</sup> Milton explicitly states the view that eloquence is connected with virtue, behind which lies the classical concept of the orator, which makes his careful attention to Hall's style more pertinent:

Another reason, it would not be ~~ad~~<sup>s</sup>mise though the Remonstrant were told, wherefore he was in that unusuall manner beleaguer'd; and this was it, to pluck out of the heads of his admirers the conciet that all who are not Prelaticall, are gross-headed, thick witted, illiterat, shallow. Can nothing then but Episcopacy teach men to speak good English, to pick & order a set of words judiciously? Must we learne from Canons and quaint Sermonings interlin'd with barbarous Latin to illumin a period, to wreath an Enthymema with maistrous dexterity? ... For doubtlesse that indeed according to art is most eloquent, which returnes and approaches nearest to nature from whence it came; and they expresse nature best, who in their lives least wander from her safe leading, which may be call'd regenerate reason. So that how he should be truly eloquent who is not withall a good man, I see not. 3

The anti-prelatical tracts are the work of a young man; they are full of enthusiasm, of powerful expression, of flashes of brilliance, but uneven in execution and, beyond attacking the bishops, uncertain

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<sup>1</sup> An Apology against a Pamphlet, Complete Prose Works of John Milton, I, 895.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.908.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.873-874.

in their aim. Though they reflect much of the spirit that started the puritan revolution, they do so through the mirror of Milton's highly individual personality, which he makes little attempt to modify for public consumption. They represent no sectional interest, and display no perception of the practical political problems involved in establishing a new system of church government, or even of the realities of the Presbyterian system they advocate. Thus, despite their energy, the anti-prelatical tracts are more impressive as personal documents than as political journalism. A comparison with the work of Lilburne will show the quality that with all his gifts Milton as yet lacked, the sense of an audience reading his pamphlets.

B. Areopagitica, 1644

Between 1642 and 1649 Areopagitica was Milton's only contribution to political journalism. The notoriety of the divorce tracts, accompanied by feeble efforts to suppress them, may have helped interest Milton in the problem of freedom of speech, but Parliament's new printing ordinance, establishing a censorship, was quite sufficient reason for the pamphlet. Areopagitica is addressed to the Parliament, and appears to be aimed principally at the members, the educated governing class, more than the general public to whom the anti-prelatical tracts were directed. The members could be expected to appreciate the classical form of an oration, the title, and the air of Renaissance learning that pervades the work. Milton appears in

the role of rhetor, a man of learning and eloquence, entitled to offer his advice to governments, giving a Greek precedent for his action. The tone is elevated but calm, free from the fervent emotionalism of the antiprelatical tracts. Areopagitica has been sufficiently analysed for it not to need another exposition, but there are two points I would like to elaborate.<sup>1</sup>

As well as reasoning generally on censorship Milton gives plenty of evidence that the particular needs of the moment were in his mind. He takes care to stress the Popish origin of licensing, quoting various Italian licences in full. He shows that he is becoming alienated from the Presbyterian majority in Parliament and from the Westminster Assembly; despite his compliments he warns them that they are about to take a wrong step on the way to liberty and reformation. He speaks out for liberty of conscience, and accuses the Presbyterians of resorting to the old episcopal practices in their desire to repress schism and sects. Some of his advocacy of liberty of conscience resembles that of Walwyn, for instance his satiric portrait of a rich merchant keeping his "religion", in the tangible form of a holy minister, and taking no further notice of it in his business.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elwyn Wilbur Gilman, Milton's Rhetoric: Studies in His Defence of Liberty, (Missouri, Columbia 1939) has analysed Milton's pamphlets in the light of contemporary training in rhetoric.

<sup>2</sup> Complete Prose Works of John Milton, II, 554-55.

Milton turns his puritan anticlericalism against the Presbyterians, distrusting their desire for a monopoly of religion; repression of the sects will be persecution. He declares his admiration for Lord Brooke, who had written infavour of toleration, and for Selden, then making difficulties for the Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly. The Presbyterian discipline is stated to be insufficient to contain England's desire for truth: "He who hears what praying there is for light and clearer knowledge to be sent down among us, would think of other matters to be constituted beyond the discipline of Geneva, fram'd and fabric't already to our hands."<sup>1</sup> The Westminster Assembly is sharply criticised; they were then meeting in Henry VIII's chapel in Westminster Abbey:

Neither is God appointed and confin'd, where and out of what place these his chosen shall be first heard to speak; for he sees not as man sees, chooses not as man chooses, lest we should devote our selves again to set places, and assemblies, and outward callings of men; planting our faith one while in the old Convocation house, and another while in the Chappell at Westminster; when all the faith and religion that shall there be canonized, is not sufficient without plain convincement, and the charity of patient instruction, to supple the least bruise of conscience, to edifie the meanest Christian... 2

The greatest achievement of Milton in Areopagitica is his magnificent portrayal and embodiment of the search for truth that was

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.561-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.566-7

beginning to shake England, and in which so many diverse parties and thinkers shared. This is an altogether more mature and successful version of the similar emotion in the antiprelatical tracts, now firmly identified with the flood of pamphlets coming off the London presses. Milton deliberately widens his argument to include both learned books and the "English pamphlet" intended for the "common people",<sup>1</sup> making no distinction between the two. He justifies the people's right to read and participate in the new movement: "Nor is it to the common people lesse then a reproach; for if we be so jealous over them, as that we dare not trust them with an English pamphlet; what doe we but censure them for a giddy, vitious, and ungrounded people; in such a sick and weak estate of faith and discretion, as to be able to take nothing down but through the pipe of a licencer."<sup>2</sup>

Milton's picture of the new energy being released in London through the press is the finest interpretation of the spirit of the puritan revolution:

Behold now this vast City; a City of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of warre hath not there more anvils and hammers waking to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed Justice in defence of beleaguer'd Truth, then there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.536.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.536-537.



searching, revolving new notions and idea's  
 wherewith to present, as with their homage and  
 their fealty the approaching Reformation: others  
 as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to  
 the force of reason and convincement. What could  
 a man require more from a Nation so pliant and so  
 prone to seek after knowledge. What wants there  
 to such a towardly and pregnant soile, but wise  
 and faithfull labourers, to make a knowing people,  
 a Nation of Prophets, of Sages, and of Worthies. 1

The results of this ferment were to surprise even Milton himself; it would include the Levellers, and Winstanley's Diggers. Influenced by his enthusiasm and the polemic pressure of the moment, he drew his picture wide enough to include men whom he might later have liked to see censored. Milton connected the visions of his early tracts with a firm grasp of what was actually happening in the state, with a subject worthy of his powerful, oratorical style, and in doing so produced perhaps the greatest of English political pamphlets. Yet paradoxically at the time it received little attention compared with the work of the representatives of the London Independents and sects; the very breadth of Milton's vision made it hard for those concerned in the practical politics of opposition to the Presbyterians to sympathise with him. Areopagitica is highly unusual in that the very qualities that commend it to us made it a failure as political journalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.553-554.

### C. The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates

Through the years of Independent and Leveller agitation Milton remained silent on politics. The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, published a few weeks after the execution of Charles I in January 1649, was of a radically different character from any of his previous pamphlets. These had been essentially personal productions of an unusual mind, The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates was closely associated with a party, and contemporary political conflict. Despite its tone of abstract consideration of the problem of kingship, which enabled Milton to avoid direct discussion of the case of Charles I and the role played by the army Grandees, the pamphlet ranged him firmly with them and their supporters in the Independent Churches. The time of publication, the justification of a course which alienated probably the majority of the nation, made the pamphlet a partisan effort. It contrasted with not only the Royalist press, but also with the ostentatious switch of the Presbyterian writers, such as Prynne, to support Charles, and the dejected silence of the Levellers, refusing backing to an act which they had once advocated. Milton did not mind coming to the aid of a government in a lonely position; that they appreciated this can be seen from his appointment a month later as Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth, and their choice of him as their official defender against Salmasius.

I believe that the style and manner of The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates show an effort on Milton's part to conform to the needs of

practical political journalism, intended to reach a wide audience.

This is his account of its conception, taken from the Second Defence of the English People:

Then at last, when certain Presbyterian ministers, formerly bitter enemies of Charles, but now resentful that the Independent parties were preferred to theirs and carried more weight in Parliament, persisted in attacking the decree which Parliament had passed concerning the king (wroth, not because of the fact, but because their own faction had not performed it) and caused as much tumult as they could, even daring to assert that the doctrines of Protestants and all reformed churches shrank from such an outrageous sentence against kings, I concluded that I must openly oppose so open a lie. Not even then, however, did I write or advise anything concerning Charles, but demonstrated what was in general permissible against tyrants, adducing not a few testimonies from the foremost theologians. And I attacked, almost as if I was haranguing an assembly, the pre-eminent ignorance or insolence of these ministers, who had given promise of better things. 1

Milton states that the attack on the Presbyterians, which is intermingled with the discussion of tyrannicide in the tract, was the reason for its conception. The Presbyterians, were conducting a press campaign of considerable proportions, to clear themselves of being held responsible for the execution.<sup>2</sup> They hoped, unrealistically, for the limited monarchy that the war had been started to obtain, but which the complete defeat of Charles had made impossible. In The Tenure

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Prose Works of John Milton IV, (Pt.I), 626-7

<sup>2</sup> See William L. Saches, English Pamphlet support for Charles I, in Conflict in Stuart England. Essays in Honour of Wallace Notestein, ed. W.A. Aiken and B.D. Henning, (London, 1960) pp.147-169.

of Kings and Magistrates Milton aimed to present the most discreditable view of their volte-face from bitter hostility to extravagant loyalty.

Milton opens with a discussion of the sense of shock created by the news of Charles being brought to justice, and considers the various attitudes of those shrinking from the deed. He reserves his anger for the last group, the Presbyterians, and their recent pamphlets.<sup>1</sup> I shall quote almost the whole of this initial attack, as it summarises Milton's view of the Presbyterians in this pamphlet, and is an excellent example of his new manner:

Nor let any man be deluded by either the ignorance or the notorious hypocrisie and self-repugnance of our dancing Divines, who have the conscience and boldness, to come with Scripture in their mouthes, gloss'd and fitted for their turnes with a double contradictory sense, transforming the sacred verity of God, to an Idol with two Faces, looking at once two several ways; and with the same quotations to charge others, which in the same case they made serve to justifie themselves. For while the hope to bee made Classic and Provincial Lords led them on, while pluralities greas'd them thick and deep to the shame and scandal of Religion, more then all the Sects and Heresies they exclaim against, then to fight against the Kings person, and no less a Party of his Lords and Commons, or to put force upon both the Houses, was good, was lawfull, was no resisting of Superior powers; they onely were powers not to be resisted, who countenanc'd the good, and punish't the evil. But now that thir censorious domineering is not suffer'd

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<sup>1</sup> Two pamphlets referred to by Milton were:  
A Briefe Memento to the Present UnParliamentary Junto, William Prynne, (1649).  
A Serious and Faithful Representation of the Ministers of the Gospel within the Province of London (1649) (Works, III, 105).

to be universal, truth and conscience to be freed, Tithes and Pluralities to be no more, though competent allowance provided, and the warme experience of large gifts, and they so good at taking them; yet now to exclude & seize upon impeach't Members, to bring Delinquents without exemption to a faire Tribunal by the common National Law against murder, is now to be no less then Corah, Dathan and Abiram. He who but erewhile in the Pulpits was a cursed Tyrant, an enemie to God and Saints, lad'n with all the innocent blood spilt in three Kingdoms, and so to be fought against, is now, though nothing penitent or alter'd from his first principles, a lawfull Magistrate, a Sovran Lord, the Lords anointed, not to be touched, though by themselves imprisoned. As if this onely were obedience, to preserve the meere useless bulke of his person, and onely in prison, not in the field, and to disobey his commands, deny him his dignity and office, everywhere to resist his power but where they thinke it onely surviving in thir own faction. 1

This passage retains the oratorical tone, but it is quieter, more controlled, and more matter of fact than those I have quoted from the antiprelatical tracts; the cool irony with which the Presbyterians are treated is more impressive than the vituperation of the bishops. Here Milton has a sure grip on political reality. He had known and trusted the Presbyterian ministers, and felt that they had betrayed their promises; he portrays them as weak and ambitious, and makes telling points about the unreality and mental bankruptcy of their change of heart. The style of the passage is simpler than that of the early tracts, and easier to understand, though it preserves Milton's peculiar force.

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<sup>1</sup> Complete Prose Works of John Milton, III, 195-97.

After this Milton moves to a discussion of kingship, where he stresses the theory of contract, that kings were created for the general good of the people, who have a right to depose them. His arguments about tyrannicide are not original, and owe something to the works of the Levellers, but they show an effort on his part to meet the needs of the scripture-minded audience of the revolution. Milton uses some classical examples, but takes care to draw the bulk of his instances from the bible or the history of Christian, especially protestant, states. After a quotation from Seneca, he shows that he realises other testimony is needed: "But of these I name no more, lest it be objected they were heathen; and come to produce another sort of men, that had the knowledge of true Religion."<sup>1</sup> Milton takes care to enlarge on John Knox's advocacy of tyrannicide, and the Kirk's deposition of Mary, to silence the English Presbyterians. The crucial texts against him are examined with some ingenuity to turn them against the absolutists; Peter II.13 and Romans 13 are explained as referring to a just magistrate only. All the evidence is marshalled with the appearance of conviction that Milton never fails to command, overwhelming the reader with reasons and authorities, yet not losing the thrust of his argument.

At this point Milton turns to consider the Presbyterians' position again, explaining how they have played a major part in depriving the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.213.

King of his actual regal authority, and thus have for practical purposes destroyed him. He has a shrewd understanding of the issues at stake, as this portrayal of the dilemma facing those who wished to restore Charles after having defeated him shows:

Nor did they Treat or think of Treating with him, till  
 thir hatred to the Army that deliverd them, not thir  
 love or duty to the King, joyn'd them secretly with  
 men sentenc'd so oft for Reprobats in thir own mouthes,  
 by whose suttile inspiring they grew madd upon a most  
 tardy and improper Treaty. Whereas if the whole bent of  
 thir actions had not bin against the King himself, but  
 [only] against his evil counselors, as they faind, &  
 publishd, wherefore did they not restore him all that  
 while to the true life of a King, his office, Crown,  
 and Dignity, when he was in thir power, & they  
 themselves his neerest Counselers. The truth therefore  
 is, both that they would not, and that indeed they could  
 not without thir certain destruction; having reduc'd  
 him to such a final pass, as was the very death and  
 burial of all in him that was regal.... 1

This plain statement of fact cuts through the Presbyterian protestations of loyalty to their king. Milton vents his hatred of his erstwhile heroes: after having cursed those who would not fight Charles in the name of God, they now absolve him "giving the most opprobrious lye to all the acted zeale that for these many years hath filld thir bellies, and fed them fatt upon the foolish people."<sup>2</sup>

Tyrannicide is extolled as a virtuous and noble action, which will put England in the forefront of other nations, vindicating its

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.233-4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.236.



status as a free country. The public trial and execution will set a glorious precedent: no future tyrant will with impunity treat his subjects as slaves. Milton takes the guilt of Charles for granted, and returns to the Presbyterians, whom he warns not to try and enforce compulsion in religion. They should know better than to put reliance in Charles or the Royalists, who will soon turn on their hated Presbyterian allies when they have been returned to power. This very sound advice is reinforced by a list of examples of the revenges of princes on those who have trusted them. The Presbyterian divines are censured for their w<sup>r</sup>oldliness, meddling in politics, and priestcraft, for following in the footsteps of the prelates, in the true Independent manner, reminiscent of Walwyn and Overton.

To refute the Representation of the Presbyterian ministers, which claimed tyrannicide was unheard of among the reformed Churches, Milton produces his strongest authorities, including Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Bucer, Peter Martyr, Knox, Goodman, and Dudley Fenner. These reformers differ from today's covetous and ambitious divines. He answers also a tract of 1643, Scripture and Reason, in which rebellion, but not tyrannicide, is justified. Trying to show the inconsistency of this attitude Milton makes a magnificent analogy to ridicule the divines:

For Divines, if ye observe them, have thir postures,  
and thir motions no less expertly, and with no less  
variety, then they that practice feats in the  
Artillery-ground. Sometimes they seem furiously to

march on, and presently march counter; by and by they stand, and then retreat; or if need be can face about, or wheele in a whole body, with that cunning and dexterity as is almost unperceavable; to winde themselves by shifting ground into places of more advantage. And Providence onely must be the drumm, Providence the word of command, that calls them from above, but always to som larger Benefice, or acts them into such and such figures, and promotions. At thir turnes and doublings no men readier; to the right, or to the left; for it is thir turnes which they serve cheifly; heerin only singular; that with them there is no certain hand right or left; but as thir own commodity thinks best to call it. But if there come a truth to be defended, which to them, and thir interest of this world seemes not so profitable, strait these nimble motionists can finde no eev'n leggs to stand upon: and are no more of use to reformation throughly performd, and not superficially, or to the advancement of Truth (which among mortal men is alwaies in her progress) then if on a sudden they were strook maime, and crippl'd. <sup>1</sup>

With several more vicious thrusts at the ministers, the pamphlet ends.

The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates is a most disciplined and mature political pamphlet, economical and potent. Milton subordinated his highly individual manner to the necessities of reaching and convincing the pamphlet-reading public of the civil war; The Tenure contains nothing that a reader of Lilburne, Goodwin or Prynne would not have been easily able to understand and appreciate. Milton also shows a solid grasp of the political situation, a knowledge of the party he attacks, and takes care not to raise the question of the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.255-6.

authority of the Council of State.<sup>1</sup> The popularity of the pamphlet proves that Milton succeeded in getting a wider hearing, and it must have impressed the leaders of the new Commonwealth. It is the first example of a major literary figure using his talents successfully in political journalism.

D. Milton's pamphleteering after 1649.

Milton's next two pamphlets, Observations on the Articles of Peace and Eikonoklastes were part of his duties as a government official. They reveal him at home in his new role of justifying the Commonwealth against the Irish and the supposed voice of the royal martyr. Though neither is as impressive as The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates they are similar in that all spoke for more than the author himself, for the dominant party in the state as well. Both these pamphlets suffer from the method of quotation and reply. Observations on the Articles of Peace breathes the typical English attitude to Ireland, that it was a subjugated country, to be ordered

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<sup>1</sup> Merrit M. Hughes (Complete Prose Works of John Milton, III, 35 et seq.) has remarked on the omission of any mention of the Levellers in the pamphlet. They were then ambiguously dissociating themselves from an execution they had done much to further. Hughes considers this good tactics, as any attack on the popular Leveller leaders might drive back to them the soldiers and radicals attracted by the execution. Milton did not care to discuss the Grandees policy of handling the Levellers with promises while eroding all but their hard core support. Later in the year, when ordered to reply to England's New Chains Milton wrote nothing; what were his reasons we can only speculate. Lilburne paid Milton a generous compliment on his Defence of the English people (The Upright Mans Vindication), (1653), p.7, quoted by P. Gregg in Freeborn John, p.313).

at the conquerers' convenience, its native inhabitants slaves. Milton attacks Ormonde's compromise with the Catholic Irish, and the tacit support of the Presbytery of Belfast. It is a very competent but routine piece of work, its liveliest part being when Milton adds further to his unflattering portrait of the Presbyterians.

Eikonoklastes was written in reply to the famous Eikon Basilike, easily the most popular tract of the period, as it could count on veneration for the royal martyr to aid its sale. Replying to what purported to be the final testimony of the dead King was, as Milton realised, a thankless and unprofitable task. Nothing was likely to prevail against a pamphlet so advertised by the unique circumstances of its production. Milton fulfilled his task adequately, but the lengthy series of quotations and rejoinders cannot help being tedious. The Eikon Basillike received some telling hits, which emphasised how unlike the real Charles had been to the saintlike figure portrayed in its pages. Milton's style as in Observations and The Tenure is simpler and his tone more matter of fact than in the earlier pamphlets.

It is important that the government should have realised the value of a controversialist such as Milton to their cause. Presumably he was recruited as the result of the publication of The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates with the intention of his writing more in their defence. Apart from the brief attempt of Bancroft to use the wits against Marprelate, this seems to be the first instance of a poet gaining office through his value as a political journalist. This role

was emphasised in Milton's Latin pamphlets, where he fulfilled the same duty on a European scale. These were not translated at the time and were not intended for the same audience as the vernacular tracts, being written in a different convention. For this reason they would be out of place in a study of English political journalism.

Milton's last incursion into political journalism, his pamphlets on religion and the state just before the Restoration, was no longer an official one. Again he could speak only for himself, and his convictions no longer coincided with the dominant political mood. A Readie and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth, the most important of this group, is full of a consciousness that the golden age has failed to materialise and that England is on the point of slipping back under the rule of a King. Written in an assured and quiet style, it is as remarkable for its political unreality as for its magnificent expression of Milton's disillusion and crumbling hopes. Again called upon to testify to his belief, he produced with all his persuasive skills a classically modelled republic, to be erected by a highly impractical series of elections; it took little account of the contemporary distribution of power or the political structure of England. A Godly aristocracy to whom all power was to be given was Milton's solution to the lack of a strong central power in England; he believed in the right men rather than new institutions. Unfortunately there were none that could imitate Cromwell and maintain a republic. The Comparison with The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates illustrates the

difference between Milton expressing his own ideas, and speaking for a party in defence of their action.

#### E. Conclusion

I have based this note on Milton's political pamphlets on this contrast; there is a difference in his manner as well as his material as he controls his literary gifts to reach and convince a fairly wide audience. From the first Milton felt he had a part to play in the revolution, but it was some time before he found his role as apologist of the Commonwealth, and altered his style of controversy to suit it. In both this role and his more personal productions he interpreted and expressed more adequately than any other the spirit of the puritan revolution, its dreams of a golden age, best exemplified in Areopagitica. Milton lacked the Leveller leaders' fertility of ideas, their centrally simple style, and their knowledge of their audience, but his literary power gave him an intensity of expression that they could not equal. His education and breadth of reading also enabled him to see and recreate the events of his day in a wider perspective than most puritan pamphleteers, in the light of the classical as well as the biblical past.

In Milton and the Levellers one can see many of the strands of political journalism that would develop in a later age. Lilburne's use of his personality recalls Defoe, in the Review, as Milton's polemic impetus reminds one of Swift, another man of letters who was able to

assume the voice of a party and use his talents in political journalism. Together Milton and the Levellers give an impression of the varied brilliance of the political journalism of the Civil War and Interregnum; with them passed a great age of pamphleteering.



CHAPTER FOURTHE EXCLUSION CRISISA. Introduction(i) The Restoration; Roger L'Estrange

The press was not silenced or rendered loyal by the peaceful return of Charles II in 1660. The vigorous activity that preceded the Restoration continued to alarm the triumphant Cavaliers. The most impressive concerted effort was made by a group of printers and publishers nicknamed "The Confederates",<sup>1</sup> who from motives of both profit and principle provided a radical sectarian comment on the return of monarchy. Pamphlets in print ranged from those of the most radical sectaries, the Fifth Monarchists, through reprints of Commonwealth tracts to the Presbyterianism of Richard Baxter. The government recognised that some kind of repression was necessary to silence the voice of the "Good Old Cause" in the press.

Fortunately for the Secretaries of State, who had responsibility for the press, an ideal candidate for the post of censor was already proclaiming the need for control and showing his qualifications for the service. Roger L'Estrange, son of a country gentleman, had both fought and intrigued on behalf of Charles I in the Civil War, and had opened his long career as a pamphleteer by writing the manifestoes

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<sup>1</sup> L'Estrange coined the name.

for the ill-fated Royalist revolt in Kent of 1648. Later he gave Cromwell sufficient assurances to be allowed to return from exile on the continent, and during the remainder of the Protector's life he remained quietly in the country. This gave rise to ungrounded suspicions among Royalists that he had betrayed secrets, or was a spy of Cromwell. L'Estrange proved both his loyalty and usefulness in the period of confusion after Cromwell's death, when he voiced the London citizens' determination to throw off the yoke of the army in a series of manifestoes demanding a free Parliament. These, printed on the secret presses in London and scattered on the streets, helped inflame and direct the formidable resistance to Lambert and the Rump. In addition L'Estrange occupied himself in answering any pamphlet he considered dangerous to the Royalist cause. He attacked Milton's last word for the retention of a republic in No Blinde Guides (1660), and attempted to foil the efforts of Marchamont Needham to split the Cavaliers and the Presbyterians.<sup>1</sup> In this task L'Estrange showed the remarkable energy and attention to detail that were to mark his long career as watchdog of the press.

Initially L'Estrange gained no reward from the Restoration. Under some suspicion for his agreement with Cromwell, he began to voice the embittered complaints of the "Old Cavaliers" at Charles's moderation, particularly at the conciliation of important Commonwealth figures,

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<sup>1</sup> News from Brussels. L'Estrange describes this period of his career in A Short View of Some Remarkable Transactions (1660) p.98.

traditional objects of the hate of the exiled Cavaliers. He criticised the compromise by attacking the Presbyterians, continually stressing their guilt for the Civil War and, more unfairly, for the execution of Charles I. He continued to point to and answer any continuation of Commonwealth opposition to Charles II, calling with increasing stridency for its repression. His well informed concentration won him the office of "Surveyor of the Press" in February 1662. As yet it carried with it little authority, but the Press Act of June 1662 gave the Surveyor the power to search the premises of suspected printers and publishers under a general warrant from a Secretary of State. The Act also contained draconian provisions to contain the press, but in practice they were bypassed and prosecutions of pressmen were conducted under the common law. The essential part was the general search warrant.

L'Estrange applied himself to silencing the press, but still felt himself hampered by lack of government backing. In June 1663 he published Considerations and Proposals In Order to the Regulation of the Press: Together with Diverse Instances of Treasonous, and Seditious Pamphlets; Proving the Necessity thereof, in order to highlight the problem. With extracts from seditious pamphlets L'Estrange tried to convey his apprehension of renewed puritan conspiracy, "A Manifestation of the same Spirit Reigning still, and working, not only by the same Means, but in very many of the same Persons,

and to the same Ends."<sup>1</sup> Drawing attention to such publications as the regicide speeches, he estimated that a hundred different schismatical pamphlets had been published since the Restoration. Twelve editions of "Farewel -Sermons (as they call them)" had been published to excite the common people; taking a conservative figure of 1,000 copies per edition this meant £3,300 profit for their producers.<sup>1</sup> L'Estrange was concerned to prove that such works sold well, which made them an attractive commercial proposition; he claimed that "honest" printers and stationers would frequently deal in seditious tracts, charitably alleging that this might be their only alternative to breaking. He proposed an attack on the whole chain of agents in a pamphlet's production and sale, from the hawkers to author, forcing each to win mercy by revealing the next in the line. One suggestion was no doubt the fruit of his own experience, "and let no Printing-House

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<sup>1</sup> Considerations and Proposals, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> In another pamphlet, Truth and Loyalty Vindicated (1662) he suggested that 200,000 single libels had been published since the Restoration. Attacking the dissenters on another occasion L'Estrange gave a more generous estimate: "Nor is the Press less active, or less dangerous than the Pulpit. They have their private Instruments and Combinations to disperse their Libels; and I dare undertake there may be found among the Confederate Stationers in this Town, above a Million of Seditious Pamphlets." (A Modest Plea for the Caveat, 1661, p.10). This type of assertion may well be suspected, but the first at least was an underestimate, as he seized 130,000 tracts in a week alone in 1664.  
(See p.

be permitted with a Back-dore to it."<sup>1</sup>

In August 1663 the Surveyorship was made a salaried office, and the northern conspiracy a few months later alarmed the government into giving L'Estrange adequate support. In an energetic drive John Twyn, a minor Confederate, was caught printing a pamphlet which justified king-killing, convicted and executed. Other Confederates were arrested and imprisoned, and their organisation broken up. This achievement was considerable, but it did not halt the flow of all seditious tracts; the sects maintained themselves in London, and had friends in Holland who followed the Elizabethan precedent of smuggling pamphlets into England. In raids connected with the Conventicle Act of 1664, L'Estrange seized 130,000 pamphlets in a week, which gives an idea of the scale of covert activity.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless by 1664 L'Estrange's energy had paid dividends; the government had more control over the pamphlet press and a complete monopoly of newsprint. After 1663 L'Estrange himself felt no necessity to reply to any pamphlet until 1678.

At this point it is worth taking stock of L'Estrange's ambiguous attitude towards the press, as he will figure largely in my account of the Exclusion Crisis. If he erred in his estimation of the power

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<sup>1</sup> Considerations and Proposals, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> George Kitchin, Sir Roger L'Estrange, a Contribution to the History of the Press in the Seventeenth Century (London 1913), p.125.

of the press it was in overvaluing it; he repeats continually in his pamphlets of the early 1660's that seditious pamphlets did not merely aggravate the Civil War, but actually caused it by infecting the "multitude" with a false picture of the king and his court, and a false opinion of their own rights and powers. There can be no doubt that he sincerely believed that the situation might recur, and that in 1663 puritans were doing their best to recreate it. With this flattering opinion of the influence of the press L'Estrange had the utmost contempt for the moral worth of those who either wrote or produced the tracts that issued from it. His pamphlets regularly contain the remark that he takes no delight in writing, that he is merely fulfilling a distasteful duty. His avowed ideal was a situation where there was no need for a government press at all, so that the King might rule uncriticised and unseconded; the majority of the people had no business even to think about politics, which were the exclusive preserve of the King, his ministers, and his loyal Parliament.

L'Estrange would have liked to suppress the circulation even of news, irrespective of comment, but both he and the government recognised that the taste for news that the Interregnum newspapers had fed was too powerful to be completely denied. L'Estrange, displacing Muddiman, the previous editor, was entrusted with the sole authorised newsbook, publishing the Intelligencer and the Newes on Mondays and Thursdays respectively. The opening paragraph of his first issue deserves quoting for his aristocratic distaste even for this useful

government monopoly:

First, as to the point of Printed Intelligence, I do declare myself, (as I hope I may, in a matter left so absolutely Indifferent, whether Any, or None) that supposing the Press in Order; the People in their right Wits, and NEWES, or No Newes to be the Question; a Publick Mercury should never have My Vote; because I think it makes the Multitude too Familiar with the Actions and Counsels of their Superiours; too Pragmaticall and Censorious, and gives them not only an Itch, but a Colourable Right, and Licence, to be Meddling with the Government. All which (supposing as before supposed) does not yet hinder, but that in this Juncture, a Paper of That Quality may be both Safe and Expedient ... for, beside that 'tis everybodies Money, and (in truth) a good part of most mens study and Bus'ness; 'tis none of the worst Wayes of Address to the Genius, and Humour of the Common People; whose Affections are more capable of being tuned, and wrought upon, by convenient Hints and Touches, in the Shape, and Ayre of a Pamphlet, then by the strongest Reasons, and best Notions imaginable under any other and more sober Form whatsoever. 1

L'Estrange put his ideas into practice; he halved the size of the newsbook, filled the first number with a long editorial comment, and slanted his news to decry his political opponents. The outcry at his slight and uninteresting news eventually led to the replacement of the newsbook by the Oxford Gazette edited by Henry Muddiman, and its removal from L'Estrange.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Intelligencer; PUBLISHED for the Satisfaction & Information of the People (Monday August 31. 1663). Quoted (modernized) in Kitchin, Sir Roger L'Estrange, p.142-43.

<sup>2</sup> Muddiman presents an interesting contrast with L'Estrange, that of the newsman, with his system of correspondents, and connections abroad, interested in news rather than politics, and the pamphleteer, concerned only in convincing his readers that his advice is correct.



Thus L'Estrange combined an open and sincere dislike of the press for its tendency to foster interest in politics, especially when this was combined with criticism of the government, with a tireless readiness to enter the field himself as a pamphleteer to undeceive the people. His manner of writing was calculated to reach the widest possible audience. In a tract of 1659 he wrote: "I Do not write out of an itch of Scribbling, or to support a Faction; my Duty bids me write. Nor do I love Hard Words, or Many, Plain, and Few, suit all Capacities and Leisures. I would be Read by all, and Understood by all; for my Business extends to all."<sup>1</sup>

The efficiency of L'Estrange in suppressing libels was largely the result of his personal diligence rather than competent administrative machinery. In 1666 his pay was allowed to lapse, and he retaliated by relaxing his surveillance. The same year saw an increase of seditious pamphlets that, helped by the rumour that the Fire of London was started by the Papists,<sup>2</sup> used attack on Popery as a means

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Footnote 2 continued from page 266.

Muddiman could handle the mechanics of news mongering far better than his rival, but was markedly more cautious in his political affiliations. The complicated intrigues surrounding the newsbook and newsletter, profitable and influential monopolies, are told in J.B. Muddiman, The King's Journalist (London, 1923).

<sup>1</sup> A Seasonable Word, reprinted in A Short View, p.79.

<sup>2</sup> The words 'Popish' or 'Papist' were in continual use in this period, and I have used them to describe or summarise the attitudes of contemporaries as I have done throughout the thesis. In particular the 'Popish Plot' is mentioned without intending to imply any confirmation of its reality.

of casting suspicion on the government. Eventually L'Estrange was recalled in 1668, presumably because his value was better appreciated. For the next ten years he enjoyed varying degrees of favour and support; during the 1670's he was largely occupied by a quarrel with the Stationers' Company concerning new press regulations which he hoped would solve the problem of seditious journalism. They were beginning to bear fruit in 1678 when the government lost control altogether. Here we shall leave L'Estrange until his own re-entry as a pamphleteer in the same year.<sup>1</sup>

(ii) 'Dutch Libels', 1672-1674

In 1673 and 1674 the government were troubled by a new danger from the press. The second Dutch War had failed to produce the quick success necessary to ensure its popularity, and Charles II and his ministers, the Cabal, were forced to summon Parliament to demand fresh supplies of money to carry on the war. It was hard to forecast the attitude of the Cavalier Parliament; on one hand there was their notable loyalty, already wearing a little thin, and traditional trade rivalry with the Dutch, on the other fears of the growth of French greatness, distrust of Charles and the Cabal, reluctance to grant money and a vague feeling for the Protestant interest against Catholicism. Initially the Parliament did not prove unhelpful, but the situation was changed by the appearance in London of a very influential

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<sup>1</sup> His story is told in detail in Kitchen, Sir Roger L'Estrange.

pamphlet, England's Appeal from the Private Cabal at Whitehall to the Great Council of the Nation, The Lords and Commons in Parliament Assembled. This was almost certainly the work of Peter Du Moulin, an Englishman of French Huguenot extraction who was in exile in Holland, high in the confidence and service of William of Orange. Du Moulin organised a small but efficient secret service with agents in London who made contact with likely members of the Commons, the object being to force Charles to make peace with Holland. As well as private persuasion and presents of money, the press was Du Moulin's instrument for solidifying pro-Dutch feeling to the point when the Commons would demand peace.<sup>1</sup>

England's Appeal was printed in Holland and smuggled in small consignments into England, where its popularity caused it to be quickly reprinted. It is worth discussing because of the way in which it foreshadows a major theme of the Whig pamphlets of the Exclusion Crisis. Francis Smith, the only Confederate known to be still in action, was among those who dealt in the pamphlet. One of Du Moulin's correspondents spoke of a printer who produced "4, or 6,000 copies".<sup>2</sup> The pamphlet contained a well written and intelligent argument about the danger of the increasing power of Louis XIV, claiming that the

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<sup>1</sup> The source of this information is, K.D.H. Haley, William of Orange and the English Opposition 1672-4 (Oxford, 1953).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.100.

French saw the attack on Holland as a war of religion. Du Moulin's refusal to discuss whether this had any connection with English domestic affairs contained a clear hint that French assistance might be used to continue the crusade in England, with the compliance of Charles and his ministers. What he referred to was the Declaration of Indulgence:

I might add several other Considerations (and perhaps of no less weight than the former) to evidence the fatal Consequences of this War: But by reason they relate to the Safety and Preservation of our Laws (as well Ecclesiastical as Civil) I forbear, lest it should be thought I go about (or intend in the least) to raise a Jealousie between His Majesty and his People, leaving it wholly to the Care and Wisdom of both Houses to provide against it, by those Means and Ways as to them shall seem meet and necessary, and as the Importance of the thing it self requireth. 1

Du Moulin suggested French influence, even bribery as the reason for the war with Holland. He enlarged upon the slender and patently fabricated reasons adduced for the war, and the Cabal's care not to inform Parliament until war had been declared and hostilities had made its prosecution inevitable. He was also able to give an inside account of the Cabal's refusal to negotiate peace except in conjunction with the French, who were making impossible demands, thus placing responsibility for the war squarely on the English government.

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<sup>1</sup> England's Appeal, State Tracts; in Two Parts. The First Part being a Collection of several Treatises relating to the Government, Privately Printed in the reign of King Charles II; the Second Part consisting of a farther Collection of several Choice Treatises relating to the Government, from 1660-1689 (London, 1693), p.17.

This combination of information and argument proved irresistible. It contained an uncomfortable amount of truth, much of which, like the reasons given for the war, the gains made by Louis and the lack of advantage for England, was public property. The rest appeared convincing; the Test Act had recently exposed Catholics in Charles's confidence, causing the retirement of Clifford from the Cabal and James Duke of York from the post of High Admiral. Louise de K roualle, a Frenchwoman, was one of Charles's mistresses. It was fortunate for Charles that the clinching evidence of the treaty of Dover of 1670 was a well kept secret. The pamphlet did its work before the next session; "in his dispatch of 22nd of March/1st of April 1673, however, Colbert reported to Louis the growth of considerable anti-French sentiment in both Houses, and in the next few weeks the pamphlet's influence was very great in contributing to the steady change in public opinion on foreign policy which was evident long before Parliament met again at the end of October."<sup>1</sup> In the next session and in 1674 Parliament resolutely refused to provide sufficient money to finance the war, and successfully pressed Charles to make peace. Further tracts from Holland helped confirm the peace for the Dutch, and letters from the States General to Charles were simultaneously given to him and published in London for the Parliament. The whole affair showed a masterly handling of publicity and a sensitivity to well informed public opinion. Though Parliament was naturally the prime target,

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<sup>1</sup> Haley, William of Orange, p.105.

Du Moulin and his correspondents continually wrote of gaining the people, that is, all politically conscious classes. K.D.H. Haley concludes: "In general, the success of England's Appeal and other 'libels' was probably a powerful stimulus to political pamphleteering."<sup>1</sup> Its view of foreign affairs was also to become a cornerstone of the new Country Party already beginning to appear in the Parliament.

(iii) The Country Party, 1674-8

James Harrington said at the Restoration that however Royalist a Parliament was elected, given ten years they would all have become good Commonwealth's men. He was optimistic, but the sessions of the Dutch peace had shown that there was a nucleus of members in the Commons who shared radically different views from those of the Cabal, and that given favourable circumstances they could carry the House with them. The coherence of the opponents of the Court at this stage should not be exaggerated. They were a loose, changing grouping, with different aims and methods. Some merely created discord in order to be bought off with office, some had an inbuilt distrust of the Court's financial extravagance, all feared its tolerance of Popery. As yet they were able to make little headway in a House of Commons still renowned for its loyalty.

In 1674 the opposition was joined by Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, late Lord Chancellor and member of the Cabal.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.222.

At first he had no great influence among the Country members who distrusted his strong support for the Dutch war as late as February 1673. He could have been waiting to force his way back into office, to extort even higher rewards from Charles. His career had not been such to inspire an opposition with confidence. On the Royalist side early in the Civil War, he had moved first to the Parliament and the Presbyterians, then to the Independents and a close alliance with Cromwell, whose daughter he had been rumoured to be about to marry. Having parted from the Protector when he would not assume the crown, Shaftesbury was later found close to Monk, in contact with the Royalists, instrumental in obtaining a peaceful Restoration. Since then he had remained constantly in high office, though not entirely trusted by Charles, who wisely kept such secrets as the Treaty of Dover only for Catholic ears. He supported the unpopular Declaration of Indulgence out of principle, but also pressed the Test Act to exclude Catholics from office immediately afterwards, leaving it in no doubt that it was protestant dissenters he sympathised with. This cost him the favour of Charles, who felt the danger to himself in the easily aroused fear of Popery. K.D.H. Haley, Shaftesbury's latest biographer, has made a plausible case for the integrity of this varied career, showing that each change can be explained in terms of principle, and that some involved considerable sacrifice with no immediate chance of profit.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The First Earl of Shaftesbury (Oxford, 1968).

Though Shaftesbury was by no means an acknowledged leader of the Country members he brought to their aid an ability and singleminded energy that the opposition had hitherto lacked. In the 1674 session Shaftesbury played hopefully on the theme of Popery, but his first real opportunity to impede the Court came in the session starting in April 1675. Sir Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby, Charles's most important minister, had since the previous year been putting into operation his plan for solving the government's problems in the House by building a solid Court majority, cemented by a revival of Cavalier and Church sentiment, and, more mundanely, by office and pensions. A Protestant foreign policy was to scotch fears of Catholicism, the royal finances were to be reformed and confidence and stability were to be restored to the government. Danby's object in the 1675 session was the passage of a Bill containing a "test", an oath necessary for all members of Parliament and all office holders to take, by which they would deny rebellion to be lawful in any circumstances, likewise any attempt to alter the constitution in Church and State. This was designed to revive the loyal spirits, exclude from Parliament and local government any moderate dissenters not already dealt with by the penal laws, and cripple any move of the Country members that could be construed as seeking even constitutional change. It would have destroyed any opposition in the Parliament. It was to be sweetened with two anti-Popery bills, one to ensure that the royal family only married Protestants, and one removing the power of choosing bishops from a



Catholic king and placing it in the hands of a committee of bishops.

Shaftesbury had consistently favoured a greater tolerance of dissenters, and had taken the trouble to form connections with some of their leaders. He had already grave doubts about James, Catholic heir to the crown, and about the church's praise for divine right, non-resistance and the sin of rebellion. He saw the non-resisting test as safeguarding James's right to succeed, an instrument by which he could reduce any opponents, in or out of Parliament. Before the session Shaftesbury had judiciously circulated a letter declaring that he was not taking a new office and suggesting a new Parliament as a cure for the nation's ills. By organising his supporters in the Lords in the tactics of opposition, amendment and protest, Shaftesbury both altered and delayed the test in a series of acrimonious debates. He could not prevent its passing, by the votes of the bishops, but so blackened it in debate that Danby did not venture to entrust it to the Commons, where it would have been used to divide his own party rather than unify the House. The two Protestant bills were treated with contempt as providing no worthwhile security, and were allowed to lapse.

I have looked at Shaftesbury's entrance into opposition in such detail because his importance in forming the Whig party of the Exclusion Crisis and the conditions for the new use of the press to influence politics was unique. At the Restoration the isolated representatives of the Commonwealth had no protection against the harrying of L'Estrange;

their remnants and successors in journalism were to find a safer and more potent way of attacking the government under the aegis of the Whig party and with the example and encouragement of Shaftesbury himself. The development of a party press was started by the Earl himself in 1675, when he published A Letter from a Person of Quality to his Friend in the Country. If this was not actually written by Shaftesbury it made no secret of expressing his attitude.<sup>1</sup> The author recounts in detail the debates in the Lords on the new test, praising the "Country Lords", notably Shaftesbury and Buckingham, for their opposition to it. Their protestations, entered in the Lords Journals, are given verbatim, some of their arguments summarised, and lists of voters given. There is a fierce attack on the new Church-Cavalier party forming round the throne; it is accused of leading the way, consciously or unconsciously, towards Popery and arbitrary power. The author shows much animus against the 'High' clergy, preachers of non-resistance and persecutors of dissent, and especially against the bishops' power to vote in the Lords, the "dead weight" being always exerted on the side of the Court. The dissenters are spoken of with sympathy and supported in their desire for the repeal of the repressive measures passed against them since 1660.

In 1676 two new pamphlets appeared in support of a Country

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<sup>1</sup> Haley suggests Locke may have had a hand in this. The First Earl of Shaftesbury, p.391-2.

opposition, and the next year saw a reply to A Letter from a Person of Quality which was given official countenance. Owing to the long prorogation of Parliament the reply had been delayed, but it appeared in time for the session due to commence early in 1677. It was a departure from the usual government reluctance to use the press to vindicate itself. Danby seems to have strangely neglected the press. Possibly this was because he could concentrate personal pressure on the Cavalier party in the Commons, and did not envisage a general election, or he may not have seen its possibilities. The neglect of L'Estrange also seems curious; the reply, A Paquet of Advices and Animadversions Sent from London to the Men of Shaftesbury, was written by a strange champion, Marchamont Needham, emerging from his career as a doctor to resume his old profession. Not letting his republican past impede him, Needham represents the Country party and Shaftesbury, whom he treats as its head, as trying to repeat the events of 1641 and lead a new Presbyterian attack on the church. He does not scruple to identify the Country party with the Presbyterians, despite the complete collapse of genuine Presbyterian hopes for a state church. Needham plays on the Cavalier hate of dissent, past and present, to the manner born. He also makes a lengthy attack on Shaftesbury, giving an account of his career, interpreting his changes of allegiance as blackest treachery and selfseeking. He makes the most of the Earl's participation in the Cabal, and his speech "Delenda est Carthago" against the Dutch. The creator of the policies his party now condemn,

Shaftesbury will at any moment desert his followers if he sees profit for himself. Needham even accuses Shaftesbury of levelling when dealing with his arguments that the old Commons have lasted too long and have become unrepresentative.<sup>1</sup> "Nay, then (methinks) I see John Lilburn putting on Robes, and uttering his old Oracles of State. What! Is there no Smith to be found in Israel, to whet Arguments for their Lordships, that they are fain to go down to him, and his Philistins the Levellers."<sup>2</sup> Shaftesbury's criticism of the bishops is paralleled again with 1641; "No Bishop" will soon lead to "No King". This pamphlet is efficiently written; indeed it is remarkable how Needham counterfeits an extravagant Royalism that he can hardly have felt, and slips easily into the accepted language of the time.

These two pamphlets put forward what were to be the violently opposed attitudes of Court and Country, Tory and Whig parties, for the rest of Charles's reign. Accusations of a Popish conspiracy aiming at arbitrary power for the King and backed by France, was countered by the charge of reviving the good old cause of a Puritan republic.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a fascinating touch, which could only have come from someone who remembered the writings of the Civil War. L'Estrange, when in search for opprobrious examples, used either the Parliamentary Presbyterians or the extremist sects; neither he, nor, as far as I know, anyone else mention the forgotten Levellers in connection with the Whigs. It was the radical and secular minded Needham who remembered that Lilburne had used this very argument against the Commons.

<sup>2</sup> A Paquet of Advices, (1676) p.50.

Shaftesbury bent his energies for the dissolution that his letter had advised, breaking with many Country members of the Commons who did not like to face possible loss of their Parliamentary privileges, and who had their own programme of reforms which they hoped they could press through Parliament. Shaftesbury rightly calculated that feeling was running against the Court, and that this would be reflected in elections. He despaired of any success with the existing motley and unreliable Country party. In the session of February 1677 he moved more directly. Pamphlets were published which argued that the Parliament was automatically dissolved because it had not sat for more than a year. One was reputed to have been written by Shaftesbury's ally Lord Holles.<sup>1</sup> In the Lords Buckingham moved that the Parliament was dissolved and was supported only by Shaftesbury, Salisbury and Wharton. They were promptly committed to the Tower, and a parallel effort in the Commons by Shaftesbury's nucleus of supporters was rejected by the majority of the Country party and thus failed ignominiously. Shaftesbury remained in the Tower for over a year before he agreed to apologise publicly for his action, winning himself new repute as a hero of English liberty.

(iv) An Account of the Growth of Popery

In preparation for the session of February 1678, Shaftesbury's case

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<sup>1</sup> The Grand Question concerning the prorogation of this Parliament.  
Haley, The First Earl of Shaftesbury, p.414.

was advanced a step further by the publication of Andrew Marvell's An Account of the Growth of Popery and Arbitrary Government in England. in 1657 Marvell had joined Milton in the office of Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth, but he was of a completely different temperament from his friend. A man of detachment and urbanity, he saw the faults of the governments of Charles I and those that succeeded him without becoming a violent partisan. He weathered the Restoration successfully, and secured a seat in the Cavalier Parliament. He distrusted the Court, and attacked it in satiric verse in at least The Last Instructions to a Painter.<sup>1</sup> His main energy went in pamphleteering against the High Churchmen and their support for the persecution of dissent. His Rehearsal Transposed won him a reputation as the champion of Restoration dissent, as well as exercising an important influence over later pamphleteers, especially Swift. No dissenter himself, Marvell had a sincere belief in liberty of conscience; he was a man of a more secular stamp than the puritan heroes, cautious, witty, even devious, but not without courage and integrity. He may have been one of Du Moulin's agents in the early 1670's,<sup>2</sup> and in 1675 he was the author of a satiric imitation of Charles II's speech

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<sup>1</sup> There is some doubt about Marvell's authorship of earlier Advices to a Painter. See John M. Wallace, Destiny his Choice: The Loyatism of Andrew Marvell, (Cambridge, 1968), pp.154-55.

<sup>2</sup> Haley, William of Orange, p.166.

opening Parliament, which was scattered on the benches of the House of Commons before the actual ceremony. It took a Country position on the inevitable request of the king for money. Sometime after Shaftesbury's joining the opposition, Marvell, never blind to the weakness of the Country party, decided that the Earl offered the best chance of checking the Court, and An Account of the Growth of Popery propounds Shaftesbury's view of the situation, that the Parliament must be dissolved. I shall deal with this pamphlet in some detail, as it is important both for its own excellence, and for the completeness with which it outlines Shaftesbury's line of attack. The suddenness of the panic created by the Popish Plot can only be understood in the light of this consistent attempt to instil awareness of the dangers of Catholicism and arbitrary power.

Marvell starts his pamphlet bluntly: "There has now for divers years a Design been carried on, to change the Lawful Government of England into an Absolute Tyranny, and to Convert the Established Protestant Religion into downright Popery: than both which, nothing can be more destructive or contrary to the Interest and Happiness, to the Constitution and Being of the King and Kingdom."<sup>1</sup> After a brief discussion of the virtues of limited monarchy, where the King only acts through agents who are accountable to Parliament for what wrongs they do, Marvell moves to the horrors of Popery. There are at this moment

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<sup>1</sup> State Tracts, I, 69.

men, not the Cavaliers or even the declared Papists, but pretended Church of England men, conspiring to introduce Popery and French slavery into England. To prove and illustrate these assertions Marvell promises a detailed account of the Parliamentary sessions of 1676 and 1677, prefaced by a history of the conspiracy, starting at the first Dutch War of the Restoration.

Marvell correctly attaches much importance to the meeting of Charles and his sister Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans, in January 1670, when he claims a secret league was concluded between France and England. Since then France has controlled all England's policy. The demands for supply carrying out the Triple Alliance against France, promptly used to finance a war with Holland, the stop of the Exchequer, the poorly fabricated quarrel with the Dutch, are all results of Louis XIV's plan to destroy the only strong Protestant state. The Declaration of Liberty of Conscience of 1672 fits into this plan as the first move towards restoring the Catholic religion in England; Marvell is not prepared to welcome liberty of conscience when it depends on an absolute dispensing power of the King. Marvell weaves together the themes of foreign and domestic policy with much skill, pointing continually to the guiding hand of France. He foregoes the literary devices and playful banter of The Rehearsal Transposed, confining himself to straightforward narration and argument. He handles his narrative admirably, holding the reader's interest, his tone consistently sardonic with occasional flashes of humour.



Marvell draws a discreet veil over Shaftesbury's support of the war in this period, moving to the next session of Parliament, that of the Dutch intrigues and the consequent refusal of the Commons to vote supply. The resulting peace has been a defeat for the conspirators, but they have endeavoured to redeem it by gathering the Cavaliers into an organised Court party, ostensibly for the protection of the Church and prevention of another '41, but really to use them to bring back Popery, an end which they do not suspect. In this light Marvell tells of the epic struggle of Shaftesbury against Danby's test and endorses his pressure for dissolution as the only way of obtaining an uncorrupted representative. Continuing the narrative at the February 1677 session, after the long prorogation, Marvell mentions the publication of A Paquet of Advices and the "prorogation libels": he is hardly complimentary to the Country party;

And on the other side, some scattering Papers stragled out in Print, as usual for the Information of Parliament Men, in matter of Law concerning Prorogation, which all of them, it is to be presumed, understood not, but was like therefore to prove a great Question. <sup>1</sup>

Marvell treats Shaftesbury's attempt to declare the Parliament dissolved with great sympathy, and is angrily contemptuous of the Commons' failure to follow it up.

Here Marvell offers a long analysis of the Commons to explain this weakness, and why the House is no longer fulfilling its true function

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.91.

of a watchdog upon the executive. One third of the House are office-holders, "court cullies", a solid body of placemen who vote as the Court tells them. Here is part of the wry description of them:

How improper would it seem for a Privy Counsellor if in the House of Commons he should not justify the most Arbitrary Proceedings of the Council-Table, represent Affairs of State with another Face, defend any Mis-government, patronize the greatest Offenders against the Kingdom, even though they were to be his own particular Enemies, and extend the supposed Prerogative on all occasions, to the detriment of the Subjects certain and due Liberties ... What Officer of the Navy but takes himself under Obligation to magnify the Expence, extol the management, conceal the neglect, increase the Debts, and press the Necessity, rigging and unrigging it to the House in the same moment, and representing it all at once in a good and bad condition? ... Must not Surinam be a sufficient cause of quarrel with Holland, to any Commissioner of the Plantations? Or who would have denied Money to continue the War with Holland, when he were a Commissioner of Prizes, of Sick and Wounded, of Transporting the English, or of Starving the Dutch Prisoners? ... Or that all those of the Capacity above-mentioned are to be looked upon as a distinct Body under another Discipline; and whatsoever they may commit in the House of Commons against the National Interest, they take themselves to be justified by their Circumstances, their Hearts indeed are, they say, with the Country, and one of them had the boldness to tell His Majesty, That he was come from Voting in the House Against his Conscience. <sup>1</sup>

However these are less dangerous than another third, the false Country members, who ostentatiously attack the Court only to be bought off with places. These are the more vicious because they are discontented and ambitious:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.94.

They are generally Men, who by speaking against the French, inveighing against the Debauches of Court, talking of the ill management of the Revenue, and such Popular Flourishes, have cheated the Countries into Electing them; and when they come up, if they can Speak in the House, they make a faint attack or two upon some great Minister of State, and perhaps relieve some other that is in danger of Parliament, to make themselves either way considerable.

In matters of Money they seem at first difficult, but having been discoursed with in private, they are set right, and begin to understand it better themselves, and convert their Brethren: for they are all of them to be bought and Sold, only their Number makes them cheaper, and each of them doth so over-value himself, that sometimes they out-stand or let slip their own Market.

It is not to be imagined, how small things in this case, even Members of great Estates will stoop at, and most of them will do as much for Hopes, as others for Fruition, but if their patience be tired out, they grow at last mutinous, and revolt to the Country, till some better occasion offer. 1

Some of these false Country members are extremely skilful in Parliamentary business, but use their parts only for their own profit. Two smaller groups are the dissolute pensioner Cavaliers, and the handful of honest Countrymen, among whom Marvell must have included himself.

Marvell argues that whatever good comes from the clashes of such motley groups in the present Commons is likely to be fortuitous. Too many Members have grown corrupt through long years of experience and care only for their own interest; indeed it now costs so much to get into the Commons that membership is tempting only to fortune-hunters. The use of the present House is finished, as they no longer have the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.94-5.

integrity to impeach evil ministers or protect the subject from the encroachments of arbitrary power and Popery. Altogether this is a brilliantly executed portrait of the Commons, drawn with real knowledge and shrewd observation, full of ironic life; it is the highlight of the whole pamphlet.

Returning to the session, Marvell notes that despite their lack of patriotism in not supporting dissolution, the Commons were not so complacent when France appeared to be gaining startling successes in Flanders. He tells how Danby's anti-Popery legislation was again dismissed as inadequate, and addresses made to Charles against the growing power of France as even the placemen become alarmed. Marvell shows his delight at the antagonism revealed between the King and the Commons, quoting the addresses demanding action against France and Charles's reiterated replies insisting on fresh supply before he runs the risk of war. Marvell had no difficulty representing his reluctance as the result of a secret agreement with Louis, stressing the fact that French negotiators were visiting him at the same time Parliament was sitting.

Marvell carries the story of the diplomatic duel between King and Commons through the following session, catching the mounting tension and calls for war are met with fresh evasions. The affair ended with a severe rebuke from Charles on May 28, 1677, blaming the House for infringing his prerogative of making war and peace; his speech was printed in the Gazette: "Thus were they well rewarded for their Itch

of Perpetual Sitting, and of Acting; the Parliament being grown to that height of Contempt, as to be Gazetted among Run-away Servants, Lost Doggs, Strayed Horses, and Highway robbers."<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet ends with specious protestations that Marvell does not write against Charles, but only attacks his evil counsellors who preserve themselves by creating mistrust between King and people.

An Account of the Growth of Popery is an exceptional pamphlet, remarkable for its able narrative, supported by documentary evidence from the Commons records, which made its version of events hard to refute. Marvell linked Du Moulin's account of foreign affairs with the charges that Popery and Absolutism were intended at home, and so interwove fact and insinuation as utterly to discredit the court. Marvell's tone of urbanity and irony contrasts with the outspokenness of his accusations, and makes it harder to dismiss them as scaremongering. Though he exaggerated the extent of the Commons' disagreement with Charles, he escaped the black and white picture of events given by most pamphlets of the Country party because of his comprehensive contempt for the Cavalier Parliament, including the Country party. His detachment enabled Marvell to present a more realistic and compelling account of contemporary politics than the partizans of the Exclusion Crisis; anyone interested in reading and discussing England's politics was supplied with a full and intelligent basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.121.

L'Estrange now judged it necessary to break his long silence and reply to Marvell.<sup>1</sup> He had made several attempts to halt the Country party press, but its influential sponsors were out of his reach, and prosecution of minor figures failed to halt the flow. His reply was entitled, An Account of the Growth of Knavery, Under the Pretended Fears of Arbitrary Government, and Popery; with a Parallel between the Reformers of 1677, and those of 1641, in their Methods, and Designs. L'Estrange does not attempt to refute Marvell's detailed narrative of recent events, but contents himself by assuming that no such attack on the government could come from a loyal subject. Following Needham and his own Restoration efforts, L'Estrange sees the pamphlet as the herald of a new '41; "You cannot but take Notice, That, the Author of The Growth of Popery, does upon the Main, principally Labour these Two things. First, To insinuate that the King is in some Cases Accomptable to his People, (of which hereafter.) And Secondly, To provoke the People, by suggesting that their Souls, and their Liberties are at stake, to make use of that Power."<sup>2</sup> L'Estrange discusses at great length this parallel with '41, which became an obsession with him during the Exclusion Crisis. Here is an example

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<sup>1</sup> The pamphlets of both were anonymous, but it was generally known who had written them.

<sup>2</sup> An Account of the Growth of Knavery, p.24-25.

of his aggressive assumptions:

This is not the first time that we have heard of Words smoother than Oyl, which yet are very Swords. It is the very Stile that brought the late King to the Block ... Would not our Remonstratour of 77, rather than his Life, be at the Old Sport again, with a Kennel of Brutes at his Heels, in full Cry, with No Bishops, No Popish Lords, No Evil Counsellours, No Rotten Members, No Porters Lodge; and at last No King too, which was very Fact in Consequence upon this Method. 1.

The whole pamphlet is an enlargement on this theme. An Account of the Growth of Popery is an outright appeal to the rabble against their King and his ministers, unscrupulously using the bogey of Popery to make them hated by the people; L'Estrange even hints that its author once belonged to "Oliver's Cabal". An Account of the Growth of Knavery is competently written, but it said nothing new, and the mood of public opinion was not responsive to Cavalier loyalty.

B. The Exclusion Crisis, 1678-1682

(i) The Popish Plot and the First Exclusion Bill

The position of Court and Country as stated by their finest writers was mutually exclusive. Each party considered itself the true representative of the nation and aimed at the destruction of its rival. Both favoured a view of politics as conspiracy, where the opposite party were inveterate hypocrites. Their attitudes as expressed in the press remained basically the same throughout the Exclusion Crisis,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.14-15.

creating repetition tedious to the modern reader. In covering the following years I shall select for discussion a few both important and representative pamphlets, and summarise the general development of Whig and Tory press, suggesting reasons for the lack of variety in the conclusion to the chapter.

Shaftesbury, released from the Tower in time for the early session of 1678, had only limited success in playing on the fear of Catholicism until the events of the last few months of the year brought him unexpected help. Titus Oates's Popish Plot, apparently confirmed by the murder of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey and the discovery of Coleman's letters, created the panic stricken atmosphere in which the Court's majority in the Commons crumbled away. The revelation that Danby himself had corresponded with France to arrange a subsidy for Charles appeared to confirm the worst accusations of An Account of the Growth of Popery. The Cavalier Parliament, once so noted for its loyalty, became dominated by the Country members leading to the attack on Danby and urging prosecution of the plot. Shaftesbury held the influential position of chairman of the Lords' committee to examine the plot, which he exploited to the full. For the first time his position as prime watchdog against Popery paid handsome dividends, and he was accepted by many inside and outside Parliament as the man who could save the nation. In the interest of both James and Danby Charles dissolved the Parliament he had cherished for so long, seeing any change as an improvement.



The press played an important part in creating the terror which lifted the first Whigs to power. The deep fear of Catholicism had long been played on for motives of genuine zeal, financial profit, and as a means of attacking the government. All three motives were behind the massive output of journalism surrounding the last plot. The first regular Whig paper to break the government monopoly was Henry Care's Paquet of Advice from Rome, published in December 1678, which concentrated on a lurid history of Popery. It was followed in February 1679 by John Smith's Currant Intelligence, and by Benjamin Harris's Domestic Intelligence. The whig newspapers reported the trials of the plotters with biased enthusiasm, and incited their readers against further plotters still undiscovered. The Government was powerless to silence them, even before the expiry of the Press Act in May 1679. Narratives of the plot were extremely popular, notably those of the principal informers, Oates and Bedloe. Pamphlets retold the stories of Guy Fawkes and the fire of London, and narratives of the atrocities of the massacres in Ireland in 1641, told with revolting detail, assured the Londoners they were in imminent danger of the same treatment. Francis Smith, raided yet again in the summer of 1678 by L'Estrange, turned with many others to publishing such material, confident that he was in no great danger from the Surveyor.

It would be interesting to know what part Shaftesbury himself played in directly stimulating the press during the whole Exclusion Crisis, but he was careful to leave few traces. After discussing the

importance of London public opinion, K.D.H. Haley writes:

From this point of view Shaftesbury's house in Aldersgate now proved to be a very convenient party headquarters. Danby's spies, indeed, thought he had a printing-press there, but this was probably a misinterpretation of a remark by one of the Earl's servants 'that my Lord Shaftesbury could have what he pleased printed, and that in a night's time'. Certainly printing-presses were easily accessible, and the government's control over them was not very effective. In principle it is highly likely that some of the many Whig pamphlets published in the next three years were commissioned by Shaftesbury; but (with one or two exceptions) there is insufficient evidence to enable us to distinguish them from the mass of libels written to cash in on a ready market. 1

A Tory pamphleteer writing in 1683 was prepared to be more specific.

However unreliable, his testimony gives a vivid picture of what was believed by Shaftesbury's opponents.

All the Applications of the Party, all Informations, all Counsels and Cabals were at Thanet-House; there the Protestant Joyner Colledg and fourteen of the Jury who brought in the Bill against him Ignoramus, who were of his Lordships Neighbourhood, the Anabaptist Booksellers Smith and Harris, Jack Starkey, &c. the Libellers of the Government, Care, Ferguson, &c. found warm Entertainment ... from thence came the Seditious Addresses and Petitions of the Furious Dissenters ...

It were endless to recount all the Speeches of this Noble Peer, made in the House of Lords, not to trust the King, or to give him Money, &c. or the whole shoals of Lewd and Seditious Pamphlets, Letters to Friends, Appeals to the City, Dialogues between Tutors and Pupils, which were Written, Printed and Dispersed by his Direction and Approbation; every Coffee house, every Town, City, and corner of the Land is full of these treasonous and disloyal Papers; and the late

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<sup>1</sup> The First Earl of Shaftesbury, p.499.

abominable Pamphlet of the second part of the Growth of Popery, a Libel that has more Lies than Lines in it, as it is confidently reported came as a parting blow from his Amanuensis, FERGUSON. 1

The Whig press was able to make a **handsome** profit, so that there was little need to finance its operations. Protection was more important, and this Shaftesbury and his party gave. Beyond this, all that can be adduced for Shaftesbury's management of the press are the manuscript of a pamphlet found in his papers,<sup>2</sup> and his close association with Ferguson.<sup>3</sup>

The Green Ribbon Club, one of the Whig party's means of fostering party feeling, has been cited as the centre for controlling the Whig press.<sup>4</sup> Though the Green Ribbon was doubtless important in organising opposition to the Court, there does not seem to be any real evidence to show that it controlled the press; I imagine some network far more loose and fragmentary was the means by which Whig politicians managed the press, for instance, through personal contact of a man like Ferguson. A fair amount of party propaganda must have been independent of any direction; there were plenty of printers, publishers and

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<sup>1</sup> Memoires of the Life of Anthony Late Earl of Shaftesbury, p.6-7. Capitals here signify Gothic black letter.

<sup>2</sup> A Word in Season to all True Protestants. Haley, First Earl, p.553.

<sup>3</sup> see p. 314. Shaftesbury also made sure that his most important speeches in the Lords were immediately published to reach his London audience.

<sup>4</sup> J. Pollock, The Popish Plot, (London, 1903), p.237-38.

writers eager to revile the government. This, however, can only remain speculation.

Though the Whigs were not highly organised to meet the election, among the earlier exertions of the press to exploit the plot appeared some election pamphlets, calling for the rejection of Danby's pensioners and the election of honest members who would prosecute the plot until all traitors were removed from office. It was only after the first Whig Parliament had met that a greater degree of party coherence could be reached. L'Estrange in reply continued to represent the opponents of the court as the representatives of organised dissent. In The Reformed Catholique, or the True Protestant, written for the elections, he sets out to discredit the protestantism of the Whigs. He does not deny the existence of the Popish Plot, but claims the dissenters are taking advantage of it, under the guise of a patriotic attack on Popery, to strike at the Church of England, and the civil government. They are sheltering under the name of Protestant to conceal their schismatical and rebellious nature. The immediate instance that L'Estrange produces to demonstrate this are the pamphlets written to persuade a bad choice of Parliament men, "to poison the People with Seditious Maxims; to create Jealousies bewixt the King and<sup>1</sup> and his Subjects, and to Undermine the very Foundation of the Government."

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<sup>1</sup> The Reformed Catholique, p.8.

He declares these pamphlets to be the work of republicans, anabaptists and implacable enemies of Charles II, who aim to raise the multitude with the vague and specious cry of 'Religion and Liberty'. L'Estrange cites some of their arguments. The author of one tract has advised voting against anyone who supports a Popish successor, James, Duke of York, Even more dishonest is their attempt to brand their enemies as "popishly affected".

Another Caution is, not to choose any man that is Popishly affected; or (as another hath it) Ill affected. But a third proceeds a little more warily, and recommends the chusing onely of Sincere Protestants, and not Disguised Papists, who are ready to pull off their Masque when time serves, and may be known by their Laughing at the Plot, Disgracing the Evidence, Admiring the Traitors Constancy, &c.

This same Popishly and Ill-affected, lies open to several Exceptions; for one Man is made Judge of the Thoughts of another, which is onely the Prerogative of Almighty God. I have heard of a man that was Indicted for Whistling; but never till now, of any Man that was Incapacitated to serve in the House of Commons, for Thinking. Beside the unreasonable Latitude, and the Horrible Iniquity of the Judgement; for if this be admitted, no man living can be secure: It involves the Innocent with the Guilty, and puts a man out of all possibility to acquit himself. And then forward; It is but turning the Tables, and the Blot is hit on the other side: For why should not I be as well allowed to pronounce another man a DISGUISED PROTESTANT, as he to judg me a DISGUISED PAPIST, and the same Liberty of Marking him too, You shall know him by his Shiboleth; for the Old Covenant sticks in his Teeth still, and the whole mystery of his Profession is wrapt up in that Oracle of the Privileges of Parliament; the Kings JUST Power and Greatness; the Protestant Religion against POPERY, and POPISH INNOVATIONS; the first point being

wholly Incomprehensible, and the other two, like Jugglers Knots, fast or loose at pleasure. <sup>1</sup>

The demand for toleration for dissenters in these libels is equally suspicious, as it is a blanket demand for all dissenters to have liberty of action, as well as that of conscience. Once this is granted, they will certainly destroy Church and state. L'Estrange provides a carefully chosen collection of quotations from dissenters' writings to prove his point. They are drawn from the Civil War period, many from Gangraena, and show the sects in their most extravagant, bloodthirsty, and domineering mood. The quotations develop into another extended parallel between the beginning of the Civil War and the advance of the Country party, evoking all the latent Cavalier hate for the Puritan. This tactic is repeated again and again as L'Estrange examines particular pamphlets, inveighing against the principle that a King is responsible to his people, reminding his readers of the persecution of episcopalians during the Interregnum, and giving vent to the same sentiments as he had in his Restoration pamphlets. It is only fair to remark that it would have been unsafe to attack members of Parliament directly, which would have brought prompt retaliation; much of L'Estrange's concentration on the Civil War rather than on the actual moves of the Whigs in Parliament during the crisis of 1679-81 can be ascribed to this reason.

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<sup>1</sup> p.9-10. Capitals signify Gothic black letter.

L'Estrange's concern is evidence that there was an element of party in the elections. Shaftesbury had long been confident that the opinion of the propertied classes was moving against the Court, and that a new Commons would prove more sympathetic to his own reservations about James. It was the general climate of opinion, influenced by the Whig press, rather than contested elections that put the Whigs completely in control of the new Commons. From this point one can speak of the Whigs as an organised party with some confidence; J.R. Jones, their latest historian, stresses their solidarity.

The first Whigs were, and had to be, a party, something more highly organised and disciplined than a mere alliance or coalition of small and autonomous groups. They possessed, and required, organisation in both Parliament and country, effective discipline, and a wide popular appeal, stimulated and maintained by a large-scale propaganda machine. In Shaftesbury they had the leader with the necessary ability, determination, experience, and unscrupulousness to weld together into a force strong enough to challenge the King, the Court, the Church, and a powerful section of the political nation. <sup>1</sup>

In its determination to pursue the plotters the new Parliament under the influence of Shaftesbury turned its attention to the Catholic heir to the crown. The Whigs had come round to Shaftesbury's opinion that nothing but excluding James from the succession would safeguard England from arbitrary government and Popery, and save themselves from his inevitable revenge if he became king. A crafty move of Charles, the

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<sup>1</sup> James Rees Jones, The First Whigs. The Politics of the Exclusion Crisis, (London, 1961), p.2-3.

appointment of Shaftesbury as President of a newly constituted Privy Council failed to mitigate his violence. On May 11, an Exclusion Bill was ordered in the Commons, but before it could pass Charles prorogued, and later dissolved the Parliament. At this the Court revived. Nat Thompson published a Tory newspaper, the True Domestic Intelligence, to answer that of Harris. In June Sir George Wakeman, the Queen's doctor, was acquitted of conspiring to poison the King, a setback for the plot. In September 1679 L'Estrange courageously ventured to hint slight doubts about the existence of the plot, in A History of the Plot.

The Whig press retaliated to ensure no ground was lost in the autumn general election. Pamphlets attacked Lord Chief Justice Scroggs for bowing to Court pressure in his handling of Wakeman's trial; one was produced by Francis Smith.<sup>1</sup> J.R. Jones maintains that the press contributed greatly to the systematic political character of the contests. "Its influence was very considerable, extending even into the country-side and small towns, where pamphlets and newspapers were received into taverns and coffee houses which became informal Whig clubs. One important effect was to counter-balance the influence of clergy from whose sermons many of the ordinary people normally gained

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<sup>1</sup> Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials, Vol.7, (London 1810), p.933.



much of their information and opinions."<sup>1</sup> These elections were frequently fought on party issues. In some counties the freeholders mobilised, paid their own expenses, and under the eye of protecting Whig Lords, defeated the local gentry. In London the Green Ribbon club organised a massive pope-burning procession to celebrate the birthday of Queen Elizabeth I, to the delight of the London citizens. Election pamphlets multiplied, now openly urging the exclusion of James, and playing more blatantly than before on the necessity of saving the country from the Popish plotters. One of Shaftesbury's friends, Murray, was taken into custody for distributing such 'damned libels'.<sup>2</sup> The attitude of Charles hardened; he dismissed Shaftesbury from the new Privy Council, and repeatedly prorogued the newly elected Parliament.

With no Parliament to work with, Shaftesbury could only mark time until financial pressure forced the King to open a session. Haley states his predicament; "Shaftesbury could rely on constitutional methods only: or, in other words, he must keep the 'No-Popery' feeling at such a fever-heat that it would be more potent than the immense assets of sentiment, patronage, and power at the disposal of the King."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> First Whigs, p.94.

<sup>2</sup> Haley, The First Earl of Shaftesbury, p.553.

<sup>3</sup> The First Earl of Shaftesbury, p.467.

The mainstay of the Whigs during the gaps between Parliaments was the press. A Much noticed pamphlet which served this purpose was An Appeal from the Country to the City, For the Preservation of His Majesties Person, Liberty, Property, and the Protestant Religion (1679). Charles Blount, deist and pamphleteer, was probably the author.<sup>1</sup> His tone can be gathered from his opening set piece, where he advises the citizen reader to imagine he looks over London from the Monument to the great fire.

First, Imagine you see the whole Town in a flame, occasioned this second time, by the same Popish malice which set it on fire before. At the same instant fancy, that amongst the distracted Crowd, you behold Troops of Papists, ravishing your Wives and your Daughters, dashing your little Childrens brains out against the walls, plundering your Houses, and cutting your own throats, by the name of Heretick Dogs. Then represent to your selves the Tower playing off its Cannon, and battering down your Houses about your Ears. Also casting your eye towards Smithfield, imagine you see your Father, or your Mother, or some of your nearest and dearest Relations, tyed to a Stake in the midst of flames, when with hands and eyes lifted up to Heaven, they scream and cry out to that God for whose Cause they die; which was frequent spectacle the last time Popery reign'd amongst us. Fancy you behold those beautiful Churches erected for the true Worship of God, abused and turned into idolatrous Temples; to the dishonour of Christ, and scandal of Religion; the Ministers of God's holy Word torn in pieces before your eyes, and their very best Friends not daring even to speak in their behalf: Your Trading's bad, and in a manner lost already, but then the only Commodity will be Fire and Sword; the only object, Women running with their Hair

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<sup>1</sup> Kitchin, (L'Estrange, p.255) confidently ascribes it to Blount. Ferguson has been suggested, but he does not claim it (see p. ) and its manner is unlike his other tracts. The pamphlet's anti-clericalism makes Blount likely.

about their Ears, Men cover'd with blood, Children  
sprawling under Horses feet, and only the Walls of  
Houses left standing... 1

Only Charles's life stays such ruin. Blount is casual in his assumption that the plot is still active; as soon as Charles is assassinated, the citizens must arm and slaughter the Papists, and not allow a Popish successor to gain power. Their enemies are beggarly officers, over hot Churchmen, and Papists. Unusually, Blount is prepared to accept the analogy of '41, inverting L'Estrange's view of it. Then as now a foreign Popish power, then Spain, controlled the English court, maintaining itself by scaremongering with the threats of a Presbyterian republic. With scant respect for Charles, Blount explains why he does not treat the plot as seriously as it deserves; the most important reason is that he is involved in a limited part of it himself, unaware that it also involves his own death. James is accused of hindering justice on the plotters, and of full complicity in his brothers imminent death, while Shaftesbury is lavishly praised for his investigation of the plot.

Another unusual feature of this pamphlet is a suggestion that James Duke of Monmouth would make a good leader against the Papists, and a good King if Charles dies. Monmouth was an obvious possibility for the crown, but the Whigs were divided on what was to follow exclusion, and it was one of Shaftesbury's impressive achievements that he

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<sup>1</sup> An Appeal, (October?, 1679), p.1.

prevented splitting of the party on the issue. The Exclusion Bills tactfully left the point open. Shaftesbury drew Monmouth to support exclusion, but it was not till 1681 that he gave strong backing to his claim. Blount merely mentions Monmouth without enlarging on his claim, and concludes the pamphlet with a warning to the owners of old Abbey lands that they will have to surrender them to "some old greasy bald-pated Abbot, Monk or Fryar"<sup>1</sup> if the successor is a Catholic. He signed himself Junius Brutus. An Appeal marks a new degree of violence in the Whig press, a perceptible raising of the stakes. L'Estrange described its impact on London thus; "This Appeal has made a mighty noise about the Town; and yet, Heaven knows, there is neither Good Faith in it, nor Argument: But all things mis-apply'd, or mis-reported to bring an Odium upon the Government, and to inflame the Multitude."<sup>2</sup>

(ii) The Case Put Concerning the Succession of the Duke of York

As well as replying separately to the Appeal, L'Estrange published pamphlet after pamphlet reiterating his view that the Whigs were the true descendants of the Civil War puritans. One of the more moderate of these was The Case Put, Concerning the Succession of his Royal Highness The Duke of York, which appeared just after the Appeal.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>2</sup> An Answer to the Appeal from the Country to the City. By Roger L'Estrange, p.1.

L'Estrange opens by referring to the pamphlets that have discussed the legality of exclusion, particularly to one that reprints the Exclusion Bill itself. One line taken by Whig propagandists was that of deep historical and legal arguments to prove that the crown of England was not necessarily hereditary.<sup>1</sup> L'Estrange promises not to join in this controversy, but to examine how the question came to be raised at all. He is profoundly sceptical of this kind of appeal to the people:

Wherefore we should have a care, methinks, of dealing in perverted Texts, and Presidents. The Devil himself fishes with these Baits; and (as somebody says) the Rabble swallow them whole, without either examining, nor dreaming of the Danger, till they feel the Hook in their Cuts. Or, if I may change my Metaphor; the Common people, are caught just as we catch Larks; 'Tis but setting up a fine Thing for a Wonderment, they all flock to't as far as they can see it, and never leave Flickering about it, till the Fowler has them in the Net. A Pomp of words, and Colours, to the Multitude, is but Casting of the Sun into their Eyes from a Looking-Glass; the more they look at it, the less able they are to discern what the matter is: & the great mischief is this; they never take themselves to be so Clear-sighted, as in those cases wherein they are Stark-blind. They are akin to what d'ye call him's Monsters; their Eyes are in their Breasts, and their Brains in their Bellies: And therefore whoever

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<sup>1</sup> The most famous of these was by John Somers, then a Whig lawyer, A Brief History of the Succession, (1681)

would make an Interest with the Vulgar, applies himself, not to their Understandings, but to their Passions, and Appetites. He comes with Absolons Exclamation in his mouth, Oh! that I were made a Judg in the Land! which seldom fails of being the Prologue to some approaching Tragedy. 1

In a magnificently colloquial and lively series of metaphors L'Estrange voices his deep distrust of the opposition press. The consequences of public discussion of a matter of state can be harmful in themselves; the stating of the cause is an invitation to the people to disregard obedience to their superiors and seize power. It is "not so much the Stating of a Case, as the Pre-engaging of an Interest."<sup>2</sup> The people will not decide on merit, but will always favour the liberty of the subject against the prerogative. Even if the people could both understand and judge, their opinion would serve no purpose, as the King has already declared himself against exclusion. There is no more to be said. James has been exculpated from complicity in the plot by Oates himself, who stated that he was even in danger from the plotters.<sup>3</sup> "A new and unheard of way, certainly, of giving Life to a Plot, for a Prince to run the risque of being Assassinated

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<sup>1</sup> The Case Put, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> Oates had, but only when he was unsure of his ground. After his adoption by the Whigs he contrived to change the point.

himself, for fear he should disappoint it."<sup>1</sup>

Asserting that exclusion will mean the end of royal authority, L'Estrange returns to the congenial theme of '41. In a mood of moderation, he grieves for the well-minded but credulous gentlemen who followed Parliament in the beginning of the Civil War intending reform, and not the destruction of the monarchy. Honest men are likewise drawn in by the Whigs to "The Old Cause Reviv'd". Some of those active in the Civil War and Commonwealth are personally involved in the new opposition; this should warn their followers that exclusion will be more dangerous to England than the rule of James could possibly be. To illustrate the link with the past, L'Estrange offers quotations from pamphlets that, to his disgust, the present liberty of the press allows to be published. These are indeed reminiscent of the Long Parliament's attack on Charles I, putting forward the contractual theory of kingship that O.W. Furley agrees descended to the exclusionists by way of the Civil War Parliamentarians.<sup>2</sup> Kings are to be held responsible to their people, who have a right to depose not merely Popish, but also bad Kings. One pamphleteer had even refurbished the 19 Propositions of 1642 and made out Charles I's answer to be an admission of their righteousness. L'Estrange mentions An Appeal from

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<sup>1</sup> p.14-15. L'Estrange here ridicules the opening of the Exclusion Bill, in the process of examining the pamphlet, A Copy of the Bill concerning the Duke of York.

<sup>2</sup> "The Whig Exclusionists: Pamphlet Literature in the Exclusion Campaign, 1679-81". Cambridge Historical Journal, XII (1957).

the Country to the City, and parallels it with rumours of Papist massacres current in London in 1641 and 1642, which inflamed the citizens against Charles I.<sup>1</sup> L'Estrange imitates Blount's opening in a picture of London in the Commonwealth.

First Imagine the whole Nation in Flame, and brought to the Extremities of Fire and Sword by the Malice of the same Faction that embroyl'd us before; and at the same Instant, Phansy whole Drovers of Coblers, Draymen, Ostlers, Quartering upon your Wives and Daughters, till ye want bread to put in your Childrens Mouths; (which was the very Case) your Apprentices discharg'd of their Indentures by Ordinances; your Houses Rifled; your Accompt-Books Examin'd; Servants corrupted to betray their Masters; your Persons sent on Ship-board, transported, or thrown into nasty Dungeons; or in mercy perhaps your Throats cut, by the Name of Popish Dogs, and Cavaliers. And all this only, for refusing to Renounce God and your Sovereign ... Then cast your Eye toward Cheapside, Corn-hill, Charing-Cross, Pallace-yard, Tower hill, nay, Whitehall it self; and there Imagine your Father, your Brother, your Citizens, the Nobility, Gentry; nay, the King himself, and his best Friends and Ministers under the hand of the Common Executioner; Appealing to God, for whose Cause they dy'd. Which was a frequent spectacle, when the King reigned no longer among you. Phansie again that you behold those Beautiful Churches erected for the true Worship of God, abused and turned into Stables, and the Pulpits into Jugling Boxes, to Hocus your Wives and your Daughters, out of their Bodkins and Thimbles; and there to hear nothing but Heresie and Sedition, to the Dishonour of Christ, and the Scandal of Religion. 2

<sup>1</sup> Some editions do not include the section on An Appeal.

<sup>2</sup> The Case Put, p.33-34. (The passage is in italics, here the underlining signifies emphasis by dropping italic).



Proud of his reversal of Blount's set piece, L'Estrange reminds his readers that this is prophecy based on fact, not imagination.

L'Estrange considers that the 'Old Cause' depends to a great extent on a well managed press campaign; in '41 as now in '79 the government has been made to look both odious and ridiculous by "Swarms of Defamatory libels, which we meet with every day in the street".<sup>1</sup> The present activity will bring an equally bitter result. "Or is it a thing not worth the taking Notice of? for his Majesty to be told every day, in a Pamphlet at his Palace Gate, that His Ministers are Traytors and Conspirators; His Courtiers a Pack of Knaves; and He himself but upon his Good Behaviour to his own Subjects? WILL it end Here? DID it end Here?"<sup>2</sup> The plot has aroused laudable zeal, but there is a "fanatic" plot proceeding under cover of anti-Popery agitation; "... 'tis but the Rubbing of a Libel with a little Anti-Popery, to give it the Popular smack; and any thing else against the Government goes down Current."<sup>3</sup> Anyone who tries to expose the fanatic plans is immediately accused of favouring Papists and lessening the plot, and his credibility is ruined. L'Estrange ends with a last call to his readers to distinguish between the words and deeds of the Whigs, to see the dangers beneath their plausible

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.37.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.37.

pretences. Both the unaccustomed moderation of the opening and the frustrated anger of the remarks on the Whig press reveal L'Estrange's sense that the battle for public opinion was not going his way, and that of censorship lost. Nevertheless, The Case Put is a careful and competent piece of work, showing that there is a little more in the comparison between the Civil War and the Exclusion Crisis than mere mudslinging.

(iii) The Petitions

Charles's decision not to call the new Parliament for as long as he could inspired the Whigs to their boldest gesture yet, the petitions of December 1679 and January 1680 calling for the summoning of Parliament. To gather these Shaftesbury and his party made contact with classes not normally thought of as politically conscious. The Levellers come to mind; no doubt the petitions did much to tighten Whig organisation. Such a move could only be successful if the press first prepared the ground, and the immense numbers of signatures collected suggest that it was not only Londoners who had been affected by Whig journalism. The Tories were disturbed by such an impressive manifestation of popular support, and Charles was confirmed in his resolve to do without a Parliament for as long as possible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a convenient point to try and assess from what social background the Whigs drew their support, how widespread it was, and also how radical was the policy they offered to the "common people" of L'Estrange. Their opponents were only too ready to accuse the Whigs of being dissenters, rabble, small tradesmen or apprentices. This

The Whig petitions excited the comment of L'Estrange, still the only Tory pamphleteer of any stature; lesser writers took their line from him. L'Estrange chose to ridicule the petitions in a

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Note 1, Page 291 contd..

picture was discredited at the time by the solid numbers of Whig gentry and Whig lords in Parliament. In a sober moment one Tory pamphleteer complained sadly: "Indeed, if the abused Countrey-Men could be brought to their right Tents and Senses, and the Gentlemen would increase to a full Understanding, and leave the Phanatic naked to his own ill looking Countenance and Interest, then I should think the Faction inconsiderable, and the old method of Elections as practical as ever..." (A Sober Discourse of the Honest Cavalier with the Popish Couranter, 1680, p.21) Yet the Whigs had much of their strength below the social level of the gentry; both of their modern historians, K.D.H. Haley and J.R. Jones, agree that they drew their support from all classes of society down to the freeholders in the country and the small tradesmen in the towns, and on occasion, as in the affair of the petitions, even below these. The Whig press served a large and widespread audience.

The question of the party's appeal to the radicals is easier to answer. The Parliamentary party and Shaftesbury were prepared to use any help they could get, down to the voteless citizens who burned the Pope outside the Green Ribbon Club. They offered no social reforms, and appealed solely to the fear of Popery. The dissenters tended to support the party which offered them toleration, and all dissidents in search of reform were pulled naturally into the orbit of an opposition to the Court. The small body of radicals on the fringes of the Whigs gave substance to Tory charges of extremism. Among these were Ferguson, several old Ironsides, such as Rumsey, West and Rumbold, once a Leveller agitator, and John Wildman. The hard core of dissenting printers and publishers, men like Benjamin Harris or Francis Smith found profit and pleasure in attacking the government with some measure of protection. In the city radicals like Jenks and College found themselves in contact with the Whig notables. Towards the end of his life Shaftesbury seemed to move closer to the radicals, speaking of violent revolution and claiming the support of a party in the city for it, but nothing came of this threat. The extremists are important more from the point of view of journalism than for their political strength; the close connection of so many of them with the press gave Whig propaganda much of its daring and violence. There is a study of the radicals by Iris Morley, A Thousand Lives, An Account of the English Revolutionary Movement, 1660-1685 (London, 1954)

dialogue between two Whig agents, Citt and Bumpkin. They are deliberately chosen from the lower ranks of the party in order to avoid direct attack on members of Parliament; L'Estrange was later to use this very argument in his defence. The title of the pamphlet is Citt and Bumpkin. In a Dialogue over A Pot of Ale, Concerning Matters of Religion and Government. The two agents represent city and country, the two wings of the Whig party. They first discuss the collection of signatures for the petitions. Citt explains that there are a number of committees set up by the party to do this, sitting in taverns and coffee-houses in the various districts of London, controlled by two grand committees. This is an interesting suggestion of the use the Whigs could put their political clubs to; the situation was sufficiently serious to provoke Charles II into an abortive attempt to close the coffee-houses altogether. Bumpkin plays the part of the simpleton eager for information.

Bum. You told me that your Committees were to procure Subscriptions; we were hard put to't, I'm sure, in the Country to get Hands.

Citt. And so were we in the City Bumpkin; and it had not been to advance the Protestant Interest, I'de have been torn to pieces by wild Horses, before I'de have done what I did. But extraordinary Cases must have extraordinary allowances. There was hardly a Register about the Town that scap'd us for Names: Bedlam, Bridewell, all the Parish-books, nay the very Goals and Hospitals; we had our Agents at all Publick Meetings, Court, Church, Change; all the Schools up and down; Masters underwrit for their Children, and Servants, Women for their Husbands in the West-Indies, nay we prevail'd upon some Parsons, to engage for their whole Congregations; we took in Jack Straw, Wat Tyler, and the whole Legend of Poor Robins Saints into our List of Petitioners; and the same Names serv'd us in four of five several places. And where's

the hurt of all this now? So long as the Cause it self  
is Righteous. 1

L'Estrange tries to bring the petitions into disrepute because the support shown them was a severe embarrassment to the government's case. Bumpkin admits that he has been paid four shillings a hundred for the signatures he produced.

Another stronghold of the Whigs was the London city government, which ensured that they could rig juries to protect their adherents, prevent the King getting loans from the city and give support to Parliament. L'Estrange wrote a separate pamphlet comparing the Whigs control over the Common Council to that of the Parliamentarians in 1641, who had used it to seize the militia. On this occasion the Council had promoted a petition, but had it blocked by the conservative Aldermen. Citty describes how the Whigs obtained a 'well-affected' Common Council.

Citty. Why we had no more to do, then to mark those that we knew were not for our turns, either as Courtiers, or Looselivers, or half-Protestants, and their business was done.

Bum. We went the same way to work in the Country, at all our Elections; for it is a Lawfull Policy, you know, to lessen the Reputation of an Enemy.

Citty. Nay we went further still; and set a Report a foot upon the Exchange, and all the Coffee-houses and Publique Houses thereabouts, which held from Change-time, till the very Rising of the Common-Council, when the Petition was laid aside; that past so currant that no mortall doubted the Truth on't.

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<sup>1</sup> Citty and Bumpkin, 4th ed. (1680), p.2-3.

Bum. But you ha'not told me what the Report was yet.

Citt. It was this, that the King had sent a Message to the City to let them understand that he took notice how much they stood affected to the Petition; and he expected they would proceed upon it; and that his Majesty was ready to give them a gracious Answer.

Bum. But was this fair dealing, Brother?

Citt. Did not Abraham say of Sarah, She's my Sister?

Bum. Well thou'rt a heavenly man Citt! ... 1

The last few lines make fun of the biblical analogy and language of the dissenters. Citt and Bumpkin are both represented as dissenters; Citt laments that the Corporation Act has cost the Whigs the loss of many who will not take the sacrament according to the Church of England.

When Bumpkin says that he fears arrest, Citt reassures him that the party can take care of this eventuality too; "...in this City th'art in the very Sanctuary of the Well-affected."<sup>2</sup> Though he does not realise it, Bumpkin will find that he has great friends, who will put their organisation to work for him: "But in what case soever; if you stand fast, and keep your Tongue in your head, you shall want neither Money, nor Law; nor Countenance, nor Friends in the Court, nor Friends in the Jury."<sup>3</sup> Citt himself is an agent for the press, who writes pamphlets and oversees the work of the Whig newspaper men, inserting useful items for the party. He offers Bumpkin a job hunting in old records for precedents for exclusion and deposition to help the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.9.

Whig pamphleteers, a task to be done with regard to party usefulness rather than truth.

To educate Bumpkin in the important subject of conscience Citty reveals that there are several kinds, of which the most important is the conscience of loyalty to party, which inspires the dissenting preachers and the Popery haters, and explains the contradictory oaths taken by Puritans in the Civil War. If a man is one of the saints, he may even make it a matter of conscience not to have any conscience at all, as all of what he does must be right. Citty justifies with specious logic both King-killing and reform of the Church, in his mouth a euphemism for its abolition. L'Estrange lets himself go in this ridicule of the dissenters, as in these instructions Citty gives to Bumpkin to fit him for his new job:

A man might lay thee down Instructions, now, for thy very Words, Looks, Motions, Gestures; nay thy very Garments; but we'll leave those matters to Time, and Study. It is a strange thing how Nature puts herself forth, in these External Circumstances. Ye shall know a Sanctifi'd Sister, or a Gifted Brother more by the Meene, Countenance, and Tone, then by the Tenour of their Lives, and Manners. It is a Comely thing for Persons of the same Persuasion, to agree in these Outward Circumstances, even to the drawing of the same Tone, and making of the same Face: Always provided, that there may be read in our Appearances, a Singularity of Zeal, a Contempt of the World, a fore-boding of Evills to come; a dissatisfaction at the Present Times; and a Despair of Better. <sup>1</sup>

There is far more humour and irony in the pamphlet than in others by

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.17.

L'Estrange; he sets out to make it entertaining as well as instructive, and invents lively and colloquial dialogue that does resemble that of a conversation. Citty and Bumpkin are simple but clearly formed characters who capture the reader's attention. L'Estrange relaxes his strident call for action for a moment to indulge in some good-humoured ridicule: "Citty. Thou canst not but have heard of that Moving Metaphor of the late Reverend Mr. Fowler: Lord Sowse us; (says he) Lord Dowse us, in the Powdering-Tubb of Affliction; that we may come forth Tripes worthy of thy Holy Table. Who can resist the Inundation of This Rhetorique."<sup>1</sup> L'Estrange is always concerned to show that the dissenters' language is as corrupt as their principles; if drawing images from common life is the question, he was as guilty as they.

Just as Citty and Bumpkin have decided that they are the two pillars of the nation, a third character, Trueman, enters and roughly admonishes them; "Two of the Pillars of the Nation, with a Horse-Pox; A Man would not let down his Breeches in a House of Office that had Two Such Supporters."<sup>2</sup> Trueman proceeds to give a direct summary of L'Estrange's view of the petitions and the Whigs, concentrating on the royal authority, the evils of the theory that it may with justice be resisted, and the danger of inviting the rabble to play a part in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.26.



politics. Subjects should never judge their prince. Naturally Citty cannot out-argue Trueman, who wins a resounding victory, a dramatic climax gained at some cost to the pamphlet's liveliness. L'Estrange could not trust to his satiric talent alone; much of Truman's argument has already been implied in the dialogue.

(iv) Robert Ferguson. A Letter to a Person of Honour, Concerning the Black Box.

While the Whigs waited for the Parliament to be summoned, their finest pamphleteer supplemented the routine Whig press with a striking tract. Robert Ferguson has already been mentioned. He was a Scot, ejected from the parish of Godmersham in Kent at the Restoration, and since regarded by the government as an incorrigible malcontent. A radical who had not forgotten the Interregnum, Ferguson won himself the nickname "plotter" for his ceaseless intrigues against the Restoration establishment. At some point during Shaftesbury's spell of opposition he befriended Ferguson, who became one of his closest confidants. When the Earl's life was in danger in 1682 it was at Ferguson's house in Wapping that he hid, with Ferguson he took ship for Holland, and it was Ferguson who ministered to him on his deathbed. Writing later, Ferguson represented himself as having Monmouth's interest at heart, but during the Exclusion Crisis he appeared as one of those who acted as liaison between Shaftesbury and the groups of dissenters and radicals that might prove useful to the Earl. Besides serving the Whigs as a first rate pamphleteer,

Ferguson may well have managed some of the Whig press. This was the common opinion of the Tories;

Shall that false Hebronite escape our Curse,  
Judas that keeps the Rebels Pension-Purse;  
Judas that pays the Treason-Writers Fee;  
Judas that well deserves his Namesake's Tree.    1

As well as popular belief there is a scrap of evidence, a printer's letter found upon Frank Charlton, one of Shaftesbury's trusted agents and message carrier, at the time of the Rye House Plot. I shall quote it in full because of the scarcity of such material.

"WORTHY SIR, - The particulars underwritten are a brief account of what service was done since May the 15th, 1680, during which time six pound per annum hath been paid for rooms, most what for that service, besides wages to two servants amounting to upwards of ten pounds, which is not all charged to the account. And all earned and charged on that account is but £56, 10s., for paper and print, viz:-

|   |       |    |    |
|---|-------|----|----|
| "The Black Box, First Impression,<br>and Print, number 1500, . . . . .                      | £.    | s. | d. |
|   | 05    | 00 | 00 |
| Second Impression, with Alterations,<br>number 1500, ....                                   | 05    | 00 | 00 |
| "The Answer to the Declaration,<br>Three Sheets, number 3000, Paper<br>and Print, . . . . . | 18    | 00 | 00 |
| "The Two Conferences, Five Sheets,<br>number 2500, Paper and Print, . .                     | 25    | 00 | 00 |
| "Reasons for the Indictment of the<br>D.ofY., number 100 <sup>0</sup> , Paper and Print,    | 02    | 10 | 00 |
| "For Bags, Boxes, and Portridge, .  | 01    | 00 | 00 |
|   | <hr/> |    |    |
| sum is,   | 56    | 10 | 00 |

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<sup>1</sup> Absolom and Achitophel, Part Two, lines 320-3. Poems of John Dryden, ed. J. Kinsley (Oxford 1958) Vol I, p.280.

|                   |          |
|-------------------|----------|
| Whereof received, | 33 00 00 |
|                   | <hr/>    |
| Remains,          | 23 10 00 |
|                   | <hr/>    |

Besides all the large premises when engaged in that service, viz., to be the Parliament Printer (and when the Parliament sat, had not one sheet to do of all the vast numbers done for them). Also £100 per annum, and reimbursement for an engine made on purpose for the service, which cost £15. A former, that cost £16, being rotted in the former publick service.

"Towards all which, eight guineas were received of Mr. Ferguson, said to be his own gift. This is a brief account of what past under Mr. Ferguson's order, which shall be faithfully made to appear to his face if he dare to stand the test, By Sir, your most humble Servant." 1

The pamphlets mentioned, the first two written by Ferguson, were all front line Whig propaganda of 1680, and the letter would suggest a tighter organisation of the press than can be proved.

Ferguson left a list of his pamphlets in 1712, when there was no danger in admitting them.<sup>2</sup> I see no reason why this list should not be accurate; the pamphlets in it have a similar style, and there is nothing in their contents to suggest any other author. The list is certainly more reliable than rumours of the time. It includes one Narrative of the plot, an attack on the protestations of innocence made by certain Jesuits executed for their alleged complicity in the plot, and at least six major Whig pamphlets. Ferguson would seem to have played a regular and energetic role in the Whig press, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in J. Ferguson, Robert Ferguson, The Plotter. (Edinburgh, 1887), p.54-55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.385-6.

producing the occasional high level pamphlet which would be recognised as the quasi-official voice of the Whig party. Considering his radical leanings this last function shows his considerable versatility, his ability to assume the mantle of a party with views differing in important ways from his own.

A Letter to a Person of Honour, concerning the Black Box, was published in May 1680 and took its title from a rumour that had been circulating in London that proof existed of the legitimacy of Monmouth, hidden in a black box. Charles II had gone to some trouble to deny officially the tale that he had been married to Lucy Walters, Monmouth's mother. Recently he had instituted a Privy Council enquiry, at the insistence of James, Duke of York, to scotch the rumour conclusively. Ferguson chose to combine an orthodox Whig attack on James with a daring suggestion of Monmouth as future king; presumably Shaftesbury did not mind the possibility being publicly suggested by a conveniently anonymous pamphlet. The immediate occasion of the Letter was a Declaration of the Council's Findings published in the Gazette on April 26, 1680. Ferguson's ingenuity can be seen in the opening of the pamphlet:

... I must crave Leave to distinguish betwixt what is material in that Business, and what is meerly circumstantial, and serveth only by way of parade. Your Lordship, whose Conversation hath given you great Advantages of knowing the Reports of the World in Relation to the King's Marriage with the Duke of Monmouth's Mother, can easily recollect, that there was never so much as a Suggestion given out, till of

late, of any such thing as a Black Box, nor of a Writing importing a Contract consigned by the late Lord of Durham (Dr. John Cosen) to the Custody of Sir Gilbert Gerard. And had there been any thing of that Consequence committed to and entrusted with him, he is both a Person of that Honour and Courage to have dared to have owned and justified it; and a Gentleman of that Discretion and Wisdom, that he would e'er this have acquainted the Parliament with it, to whom both the Cognizance and Decision of a Matter of so grand Importance do properly belong. But in Truth, the whole referring to the Black Box, is a mere Romance, purposely invented to sham and ridicule the Business of the Marriage, which indeed hath no Relation to it. For they who judged it conducive to their present Interest to have the Duke of Monmouth's Title to the Crown not only discredited but exposed, thought it necessary, instead of nakedly enquiring whether he be the King's Legitimate or only Natural Son, to bring upon the Stage a Circumstance no way annexed with it, supposing that this being found a Fable, the Marriage itself of the King with the Duke's Mother, would have undergone the same Censure. 1

This passage shows how Ferguson can introduce the most startling ideas with an air of stating the obvious. He alters the whole grounds of the controversy in one paragraph, turns the crudity of the rumour to Monmouth's advantage, and is able to move rapidly from the defensive to the subject of the Duke of York. James is the author of the whole investigation, the dishonesty of which appears from it being raised in the Privy Council, instead of the Parliament, where it would have been more appropriate. If truth had been the object of the enquiry there were better pieces of evidence than the coffee house

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<sup>1</sup> The Somers Tracts (1st ed., London, 1748-1752) I, 74.

tale of a Black Box; Ferguson casually mentions several, such as alleged assurances of legitimacy given to Monmouth's mother-in-law before his marriage, and a letter from Charles II to his 'wife' intercepted by Cromwell. He cleverly avoids letting his case rest on these suggestions, first by reserving the matter of their authenticity to a Parliamentary enquiry, and paradoxically claiming that Parliament in any case has the power to alter the hereditary succession, which on the surface makes Monmouth's legitimacy unimportant. Thus Ferguson disarms criticism of his weak point, actual evidence, while his allegations of Monmouth's legitimacy still stand to influence the more conservative. By his flattering passing of the whole matter to Parliament Ferguson also aligns himself with the Parliamentary party and points to a possible retreat from Monmouth's candidacy altogether.

Now Ferguson turns on York; it would have been more useful for the Council to have examined whether his life is forfeit for treason on account of his Popery, as he is hand in glove with the plotters. Charles increases the chance of being assassinated by trying to settle the succession on his brother:

For, as his Majesty cannot subsist nor preserve the Reputation of his Crown and Government many Months longer, without a Parliament, no more can they, [the Papists] through the Number, Quality, and Palpableness of their Crimes, bear one; so that the Necessity of their Affairs, as well as their Inclinations, seconded by their Principles, oblige

them, by one Means or another, to remove him... <sup>1</sup>

Ferguson promises this likely eventuality will be revenged <sup>o</sup>thoroughly on the Papists. He ends the pamphlet with an account of Gerard's examination, where he is described as mystified with the whole business, especially the King's insistence he should swear that he knows nothing of a Black Box. Again the crudity of the rumour is turned to the Whig's advantage. Gerard was a man of some repute, and impugning his testimony would have gained nothing. Ferguson expatiates on the illegality of forcing him to swear an oath when not accused and utters dark threats of what will happen when the long awaited Parliament arrives.

The effect of this pamphlet was sufficient to persuade Charles to make yet another, longer Declaration, signed and witnessed, and to publish it in the Gazette of June 18, 1680, that he had not married Lucy Walters. The very repetition played into Ferguson's hands, and he set out to demolish the Declaration in a second pamphlet, A Letter to a Person of Honour concerning the King's disavowing the having been married to the D. of M.'s Mother. Besides vindicating Monmouth's legitimacy, Ferguson set out to patch a manifest weakness in the Whig case, the unfavourable attitude of Charles to excluding his brother. This was the mainstay of L'Estrange, for instance, enabling him to present exclusion as a rebellious infringement of the King's prerogative.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.77-8.

Ferguson took a bolder attitude to this question than the traditional one of evil counsellors misrepresenting things to the King, as used by Marvell in 1678; this polite fiction was not close enough to reality for it to carry much conviction. Neither did he follow An Appeal from the Country to the City and number Charles among the plotters.

I shall quote the two paragraphs that open the argument because only in a long passage can it be seen how in apparently straightforward sentences Ferguson carefully works upon his reader. He affects to state the views of well informed observers of politics.

And in the first place; They say it is no surprize to them, that seeing the D. of Y. hath gotten the Ascendant of the King, he should hector him into, or at least extort from him the foresaid Declaration. For, can any imagine, that he who for some time renounced his own Wife, and had provided Persons to swear a familiarity with her that made her unworthy of being Dutchess of York; should scruple to importune the King to do as much by Mrs. Walters, tho it were never so demonstrable that he was married unto her. The course he practised himself, he may without any breach of Charity be thought ready to prescribe to others. And it may be, he thinks it will be some extenuation of what he did himself, if people can be brought to believe that it is a Disease natural to the Family, and which runs in a Blood. Now we all know, not only with what Asseverations the D. disclaimed his Marriage with Mrs. Hide, but with what reflexions upon her Chastity he did it. And yet the Proofs of the said Marriage were so evident, that he was necessitate at last to acknowledge it; and to own her for his Wife, after he had by himself, and many others, Proclaimed her for no better than a Common Whore. And I'm sure it left this Impression upon most Persons, That his Faith to Men was not very far to be relied on, seeing he made so slight of that Faith which he had plighted in an Ordinance of God to a harmless Lady.

Secondly, Most men do observe this difference



between the Kings Renouncing Mrs. Waters, and the Dukes Disclaiming Mrs. Hide; That what the Duke did, was an Act of Inclination and Choice, whereas it is apparent, that what the King hath done, is the result of Dread and Fear. For, to use his Majesties own expression not long ago, He was harassed out of his Life, by the importunity of his Brother; & as He added, He could rather chuse to Die than Live so uneasily as he did, while he withstood their daily Sollicitations in this matter. And as nothing made the Duke honest to Mrs. Hide, but the interposition of his Majesties Authority, from a sense of the Justness of the Ladies Complaint; so they believe the King is only Injurious through the Influence of others, and that when rescued out of ill Hands, and left to himself, he will return to be Just. For though his Majesty be a Prince of that clearness of Understanding, that they cannot baffle him by false Reasonings, yet he hath so much of James's timidness, that they can huffe and over-awe him to things most opposite to his Judgement, as well as cross to his Interest. And let me upon this occasion remind your Lordship of a story, of a Scots Nobleman to my Lord Burleigh, upon that wise Statesman's desiring a Character of King James, long before he ascended the English Throne. If your Lordship, saith the blunt Scotsman know a Jack-a-napes, you cannot but understand, that if I have him in my hands, I can make him bite you, whereas if you get him into your hands, you may make him bite me. 1

Ferguson at once attributes the Declaration to James rather than Charles. Then he switches attention to the scandal over James's marriage to Anne Hyde, making the most of this fact to make the reader accept his contentious dismissal of the Declaration. Slipped in casually is a sneer at the Stuart morals, "a Disease natural to the Family." In the second paragraph Ferguson sketches his character

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<sup>1</sup> A Letter to a Person of Honour Concerning the King's disavowing the having been married to the D. of M's Mother, p.1-2.

of Charles, as many, including Shaftesbury, saw him, an intelligent but weak man, dominated by his more forceful brother. This disrespectful treatment of the King, who is mentioned first with contemptuous patronage, then with open scorn in the story of the monkey, was designed to hearten the Whigs troubled by the royal displeasure, and reassure them that Charles could be forced to bow to Parliament. This passage sets the tone for the portraits of the brothers that the whole pamphlet fills out, those of undignified weakness manipulated by corrupt ambition. Ferguson's easy progression from point to point makes his daring assertions the more credible; the passage has a polemic thrust that is rare in the journalism of the Exclusion Crisis.

The pamphlet is more of an attack on Charles's character than a defence of Monmouth's claim, which is treated in a small section dealing with the alleged evidence for his legitimacy, and demanding a Parliamentary enquiry to decide the whole business. Ferguson then comes to the heart of the tract, a series of arguments rapidly brought forward to discredit the Declaration completely, and undermine its formal gravity. Kings are not remarkable for their truthfulness, and are prone to use their position to conceal engagements that they entered into in their youth. The reader is reminded of the secret marriage of Edward IV, denied by him but afterwards recognised by Parliament. Ferguson remarks scathingly that perhaps Charles's constant promiscuity has made him forget that he ever lived in lawful wedlock. Here Ferguson appeals to the widespread revulsion from the

life of the court, and through his affectation of the easy tone of a man of the world can be recognised the disgust of the Puritan.

To cast further doubts on the sanctity of a royal Declaration Ferguson examines several former Declarations of Charles, showing how he has used this form of publicity to gain his immediate ends, without scruple as to whether promises he has made in them were kept. Indeed Charles has broken his formal word so many times that he runs the risk of never being believed at all. The final illustration of this is a recent Declaration, that of 20 April 1679, in which Charles had attempted to mollify temporarily the Whig party. In it he had promised not to depend on private advice, but to govern with the aid of the new Privy Council and Parliament. Ferguson comments:

Far be it from me to blame his Majesty for the disappointment of those hopes which the People had so universally conceived upon that Declaration which was so full of ingenuity and candor, and so adapted to the Honour, Safety, and Interest both of King and Kingdom; but this may be said without the least umbrage of irreverence, that the same pestilent men who were able to cause his Majesty to violate such a Declaration wherein he spake the most like a wise and good Prince that ever he did, may be also able by the same ascendant influence to wrest an unadvised and bad one from him. The same Councils which prevailed upon him to go against both his Royal Word, and all the Maxims of Pollicy with which he is so richly endowed; may they not likewise be conceived to have over-rull'd him in this to speak against his knowledge and those moral Principles of Truth and Justice, with which when left to himself he appears to be imbued. 1

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.10.

The ironic pretence of respect is more cutting than outright violence. The reader is left with little confidence in any declaration.

Continuing through the Declaration of Monmouth's illegitimacy Ferguson considers the value of Charles's solemn oath that he never married Lucy Walters. In case any religious person is impressed by such piety, Ferguson sneers that this will not be the first oath Charles has sworn falsely. His personal feelings suddenly show in a bitter comment on the solemn manner in which Charles took the Covenant in the Interregnum, which he broke so soon. After this flash Ferguson produces more suitable evidence of Charles's lack of respect for oaths in a scathing attack on his constant and open adultery, which shows how he regards the marriage vow. This very Declaration is an admission of promiscuity; if Charles can publish this, "will he forbear sins of any kind or hue out of Principle, though he may possibly omit them by accident, and in compliance with Interest."<sup>1</sup>

Charles' natural duplicity is now reinforced by pressure from James, who threatens to reveal disgraceful secrets to Parliament if public assurances of Monmouth's illegitimacy is not given. The stated reason for publication, to relieve the minds of Charles's subjects, is so fantastic as to afford pleasant diversion; who will be relieved to find his future king a professed enemy of the established religion and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.11.

government? This leads to an ironic list of James' virtues, where Ferguson accuses him of being the author of all England's ills. James has seduced Protestants to Popery, placed Papists in the army, promoted the plot as a means to attain arbitrary power and convert the country forcibly to Popery. He is responsible for the Fire of London, and for the Dutch wars. He has faked dissenting plots to save Popish conspirators, and frustrated Parliament's attempts to investigate the Plot. Ferguson ends with another demand for a Parliament to set the nation at rest and try James for his treasons. This pamphlet is an unusually efficient piece of work for the period; in it Ferguson, by his critical examination of the royal Declaration, creates a version of Court politics and royal character to encourage the Whigs.

(v) Whig Success: The second Exclusion Bill

In the spring and summer of 1680, when it became clear that Parliament would not meet for some time, there was a rallying of Tory support to Charles. The government moved against the Whig pressmen, Scroggs making a speech against libels at the beginning of the May term, threatening prosecution. Benjamin Harris, despite a sympathetic courtroom ~~and~~ audience and jury, was imprisoned and fined £500 for printing An Appeal from the Country to the City. The fine was set so high to discourage the Whigs from bailing him out. Henry Care was convicted for a passage in his Popish Courant, and more trials followed, not all with such happy results. Francis Smith, when raided in December 1679, denounced the legality of the general warrant and threw

a press messenger and constable out of his shop. In May 1680, he evaded sentence for his attack on Scroggs for his conduct of the Wakeman trial, and came off triumphant in the following September with an "ignoramus" verdict. Others taken escaped with mere submissions, and the momentum of the press was not significantly halted.

L'Estrange helped the Tory resurgence by steadily hinting in a series of pamphlets that the Plot was being exaggerated and manipulated by skilful use of the press. He was forced to concede victory to the men he had tried so hard to silence; "It is a great poynt gain'd where a Faction has gotten so much the Command of the People, as to make them believe everything that They Say, and approve of everything that they do."<sup>1</sup> He reiterated his criticism of the Whig press throughout the spring and summer of 1680, but his own position was far from secure. His enemies had hopes of revenge, and had for some time accused him of attending mass, hoping to see him discomfited by the Parliament, due to sit in October 1680. Later in the year his writings contain much personal vindication as well as the usual material. L'Estrange was vulnerable in that he had become involved in the "Meal Tub Plot", an attempt of some Catholics to forge a Presbyterian plot against the government. The fraud was detected, and L'Estrange forced on the defensive. His innocence was not likely to be respected by a Whig Parliament. When Parliament met at the appointed time, the Lords'

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<sup>1</sup> L'Estrange's Narrative of the Plot, (1680), p.5.

committee for investigating the plot, presided over by Shaftesbury, recommended L'Estrange should be discharged from his office, and on October 30, the Lords ordered his arrest after hearing evidence that he was corrupt from his enemies the printers. L'Estrange had by this time fled to Scotland, pursued by the delighted taunts of his opponents. Strange's Case, Strangely Altered was the heading of one broadsheet.<sup>1</sup> His effigy was burnt alongside that of Mrs. Cellier, of Meal Tub fame, at the next Pope-burning procession.

The Parliament did not forget to protect their own journalists. Harris had his fine remitted and was released from prison, and Scroggs and Weston were impeached, partly for their attempt to intimidate the Whig press. The Trial of Care figured as a separate article in the impeachment, that of Harris and others comprised another. Francis Smith was given honourable mention. Charles complied and removed Scroggs from the bench and for the two months Parliament sat the Whig printers and publishers enjoyed complete freedom to print what party material they could. Harris celebrated his triumph with a pamphlet entitled, The Triumphs of Justice over Unjust Judges (1681), dedicated to Scroggs himself. Francis Smith pleaded for compensation for his sufferings since the Restoration in An Account of the Injurious Proceeding of Sir George Jefreys, Knt, Late Recorder of London, Against Francis Smith, Bookseller (1680). It was dedicated to Shaftesbury

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted Kitchen, Sir Roger L'Estrange, opp. p.258.

thanking him for repeated kindnesses to Smith and his Family.<sup>1</sup>

Smith recounts his involvement in seditious pamphlets, laments the deaths in prison of the old Confederates, and attacks the general search warrant in a manner reminiscent of Lilburne. The Whig press had never had such confidence before their happy association with Parliament.

The Exclusion Bill was soon past the Commons. In the Lords Shaftesbury demanded surrender in a speech of unprecedented violence, in the presence of Charles himself:

For there must be (in plain English), my Lords, a change; we must neither have popish wife, nor popish favourite, nor popish mistress, nor popish counsellor at court, or any new convert...

My Lords, it is a very hard thing to say, "that we cannot trust the King"; and that we have already been deceived so often, that we see plainly the apprehensions of discontent in the people is no argument at Court... this I know, and must boldly say it, and plainly, That the nation is betrayed if upon any terms we part with our money till we are sure the King is ours; have what laws you will, and what conditions you will, they will be of no use but waste paper before Easter, if the Court has money to set up for popery and arbitrary designs in the meanwhile. 2

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<sup>1</sup> Shaftesbury had recompensed Smith for some pamphlets raided from him while he was Lord Chancellor. Where there other favours? And was Shaftesbury building an interest in the press at that time?

<sup>2</sup> Speech of 23 December 1680, published in a few days under the title, A Speech lately made by a noble peer of the realm. Haley, The First Earl of Shaftesbury, p.613.



The Whig press could not surpass the outspokenness of the Whig leader. No money was granted, but when the Exclusion Bill arrived in the Lords the greatest efforts of Shaftesbury could not pass it; the bishops, voting against proved decisive, and Charles refused to surrender and throw court votes behind the measure. At this the Commons proceeded in rage with a series of measures against the court, including votes against all ministers who they felt had hindered exclusion. They even voted in favour of a toleration for dissenters. Taking the first opportunity to dismiss such a hostile Commons, Charles again dissolved Parliament.

(vi) The Oxford Parliament

The new elections gained the Court nothing, and the new Parliament, Whig as the last, was called to meet at Oxford, traditional Royalist city, to prevent Shaftesbury using the London citizens to put pressure on Charles as the Long Parliament of 1641 had done to his father. The Whigs rode armed to Oxford, claiming that they feared violence from the town and from the King's guards. To whip up their party's enthusiasm the Whigs published Elkanah Settle's, The Character of a Popish Successour, And What England may expect from such a One, Humbly Offered to the Consideration of both Houses of Parliament, appointed to Meet at Oxford. Settle's style is unusually affected and embroidered, straining after metaphors. He is concerned to show the absolute necessity of excluding James, on the grounds of the horrors with which he will attempt to force arbitrary power and Popery on the

country. In answer to Tory defences of James which stressed his military courage and his faithfulness, Settle produces the paradox that all such qualities will merely make his persecution of all Protestants more thorough. Once James grasps power: "What does his licentious holy thirst of Blood do less, than make his Kingdom a larger Slaughter-house, and his Smithfield an Original Shambles?"<sup>1</sup> Turning to Charles with a little flaccid praise, Settle repeats the blunt message of Ferguson in his own unctuous and inflated manner, By protecting his brother Charles endangers himself.

Thus whilst the long and lawful Fears of a drooping Nation have fully and justly satisfied them, that the kindest and most favourable Aspect of Majesty that smiles on England, through the Defence and Interest of a Popish Heir, shines but like the Sun through a Burning-glass, whose gentlest morning vernal Beams, through that fatal Medium, do but burn and consume what otherwise they would warm and cherish; what can the consequence of this unhappy Friendship be, but that the very Souls and Loyalties of almost a whole Kingdom are staggered at this fatal Conjunction; till I am afraid there are too many, who in detestation of that one gangreen'd Branch of Royalty, can scarce forbear (how undutifully soever) to murmur and revile even at that Imperial Root that cherishes it? 2

Settle argues the legality of exclusion with an additional persuasion, that James is sure to revenge himself on those who moved it if he does become King. He even goes so far as to agree that rebellion is legal

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<sup>1</sup> State Tracts, I, 152.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.155.

against a King who destroys the constitution; England is a limited monarchy, and passive obedience will reduce it to arbitrary tyranny. Settle's style is hopelessly affected, and his arguments simple and unoriginal, but he reflects the increased tension, the feeling that the stakes had risen yet again that prevailed among the Whigs before the Oxford Parliament.

The "Short" Oxford Parliament opened in the same spirit as the last had ended. The votes of the House of Commons were immediately ordered to be printed, as before, against feeble court resistance. One of the Commons pronounced, "I think it not natural nor rational that the people who sent us hither, should not be informed of our Actions."<sup>1</sup> The Exclusion Bill went through the Commons again, and Shaftesbury sounded the King about the possibility of legitimising Monmouth, but the Whigs were surprised by the sudden dissolution of Parliament after only a week's sitting. Charles was determined to stand by his brother, and in Oxford the Whigs did not dare to try and remain sitting in defiance. In fact this was the beginning of the end of the first Whigs as a political force, though this was not evident at the time. The party prepared for new elections, and only gradually realised that Charles could do without the grants that they had so persistently refused him. Louis XIV had promised regular supplies, and thus removed the Commons' only strong bargaining point. Charles

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<sup>1</sup> The Debates In the House of Commons assembled at Oxford, March 21 1680 (old style) (1681), p.4.

was never to call another Parliament.

(vii) A Just and Modest Vindication of the proceedings of the Two  
Last Parliaments

Charles took care to publish a Declaration explaining why he had dissolved two Parliaments so rapidly, accusing the Whigs of factious extremism. Ambitious men had been manipulating Parliament, and the sacred principle of the succession had been threatened, despite the generous offer of Charles to provide in other ways against Catholicism, such as by limitations on James's future authority. Ferguson countered this on behalf of the Parliamentary Whigs, shedding his true character of a radical, and even of a supporter of Monmouth, for that of self-styled moderate. His pamphlet was entitled, A Just and Modest Vindication of the proceedings of the Two last Parliaments (1681).

Ferguson wastes no space opening: "The Amazement which seiz'd every good Man, upon the unlook'd for Dissolution of two Parliaments within three Months, was no greater then at the sight of a Declaration pretending to justifie, and give Reasons, for such extraordinary Proceedings."<sup>1</sup> He assumes with his typical affectation of stating the obvious, that ancient statutes prove that Parliament should be called yearly, citing authorities in the margin.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this

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<sup>1</sup> State Tracts, (1693), p.165.

<sup>2</sup> This had been a favourite theme of the Country party earlier, enlarged on at the long prorogation.

provision is to prevent kings under the influence of evil counsellors from not summoning Parliaments, or dissolving them before their work is done. The Declaration itself is not sanctioned by a seal, and thus has no constitutional authority. The King can only speak as King through his officers, who can then be called to answer for their actions, and cannot then plead the King's orders to shield themselves. This is the true meaning of the saying 'The King can do no wrong.' Thus, Ferguson jeers, it would be more rational to blame the printer than the King for the Declaration. Here Ferguson uses standard Whig theory to strengthen the Commons against the King, supporting their most cherished privilege, the right to impeach evil ministers. This was to be of great importance in later constitutional development, in necessitating the support of a majority in the Commons for any ministry.<sup>1</sup>

After this flattery of Parliament's ambitions, Ferguson comes to the Declaration itself:

The Truth is, Declarations to justifie what Princes do, must always be either needless or ineffectual. Their Actions ought to be such as may recommend themselves to the World, and carry their own Evidence with them of their Usefulness to the Publick; and then no Arts to justifie them will be necessary. When a Prince descends so low as to give his Subjects Reasons for what he has done, he not only makes them Judges whether there be any weight in those Reasons, but by so unusual a Submission

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<sup>1</sup> See Clayton Roberts, The Growth of Responsible Government, (Cambridge, 1966) for a full account of this theory.

gives cause to suspect, that he is conscious to Himself that his Actions want an Apology. And if they are indeed unjustifiable, if they are Opposite to the Inclinations, and certainly destructive of the Interest of his Subjects, it will be very difficult for the most eloquent or Insinuating Declaration, to make them in Love with such things. And therefore they did certainly undertake no easie Task in pretending to perswade Men who see themselves exposed to the restless Malice of their Enemies, who observe the languishing Condition of the Nation, and that nothing but a Parliament can provide Remedies for the great Evils which they Feel and Fear; that two several Parliaments, upon whom they had placed all their Hopes, were so suddenly broken out of kindness to them, or with any Regard to their Advantage. 1

One can already see that Ferguson has returned to the polite fiction of evil counsellors misleading Charles in his role of defender of the Parliament. These men have fortunately given themselves away in the Declaration by objecting violently to Parliament's censure of certain eminent persons. Changing tack, Ferguson analyses the language of the Declaration to find Gallicisms in it. Perhaps a Frenchman, or one in the interest of France has had a hand in the Declaration. This is supported by a round assertion that Barillon, the French ambassador, and the French court itself possessed copies of the Declaration before it was shown to the Privy Council.

Having in a short space recreated the familiar picture of an evil group of ministers in the pay of French perverting the King and turning him against the unanimous voice of his people, Ferguson stoutly defends the Oxford Parliament's increased bitterness, remarked

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<sup>1</sup> State Tracts, p.166.

upon in the Declaration:

Nor is it at all strange that it should fall out so: For the Court never did yet Dissolve a Parliament abruptly, and in Heat, but they found the next Parliament more averse, and to insist upon the same things with greater Eagerness than the former. English Spirits resent no Affronts so highly as those which are done to their Representatives; and the Court will be sure to find the effects of that Resentment in the next Election. A Parliament does ever participate of the present Temper of the People... And therefore while the People do so universally hate and fear France and Popery, and do so well understand who they are who promote the French and Popish Interests, the Favourites do but cozen themselves to think that they will ever send up Representatives less zealous to bring them to Justice, than those against whom this Declaration is published. 1

Ferguson here exploits to the full the advantage of a constitutional, organised party working to command Parliament, representing the Whigs as the spokesmen of a united nation. He defends the Parliament's moderation and representative character; the Parliaments were full of men of good sense and quality, men of property, not republicans and dissenters. Charles himself invited them to prosecute the plot and find measures to safeguard the protestant religion; Ferguson quotes several addresses of his to extract full advantage from the point. Are they to be blamed for complying to the best of their judgement? He admits ironically that Parliament may have been a little provoked by the way James shielded Papists and promoted faked protestant plots.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.167.

In the following quotation Ferguson attacks the Declaration's pretence that Charles did everything he could to satisfy Parliament, making their distrust of him sheer factiousness.

But we are told, That his Majesty Opened the last Parliament, which was held at Westminster, with as Gracious Expressions of His readiness to satisfie the Desires of his Subjects, and to secure them against all their just Fears, as the weightier consideration, either of preserving the Established Religion and Property of his Subjects at Home, or of supporting His Neighbours and Allies Abroad, could fill his Heart with. We must own that His Majesty has Opened all his Parliaments at Westminster, with very Gracious Expressions; nor have we wanted that Evidence of His Readiness to satisfie the desire of His Subjects, but that sort of Evidence will soon lose its Force if it be never followed by Actions correspondent, by which only the World can judge of the sincerity of Expressions or Intentions. And therefore the Favourites did little Consult His Majesty's Honour, when they bring him in solemnly declaring to his Subjects, That His Intentions were as far as would have consisted with the very Being of the Government, to have complied with anything that could have been proposed to him to accomplish those Ends: when they are not able to produce an Instance wherein they suffered him to comply in any one thing. Whatsoever the House of Commons address'd for, was certainly denied, though it was only for that Reason; and there was no surer way of entitling ones self to the Favour of the Court, than to receive a Censure from the Representative Body of the People. 1

Ferguson sardonically undercuts the smooth tone of the Declaration to show its unreality, cleverly picking up some of its phrases; he uses "gracious expressions" throughout the pamphlet, until he makes it a byword for all the Commons obtained from the Court.

Proceeding to examine the above point in more detail, Ferguson

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.168-169.



admits, for arguments sake only, that some demands of the Parliament were exorbitant. However others were perfectly reasonable, and gave the Court ample opportunity to show a spirit of compromise. Some of these requests were: that the Justices of the Peace dismissed for harshness to Papists should be reinstated: that Jefferies and Halifax should be removed from their offices: that the statute of 35th Elizabeth against sectaries should be repealed. The last point was a sore one; the bill repealing this statute had actually passed both Houses at Westminster, but Charles had ordered the Clerk of the Parliament not to present it for his assent or veto at the end of the session, and it had lapsed by default. In dealing with this additional breach of the constitution Ferguson gives no hint of his true affiliation, remarking, "And tho' the Fanaticks perhaps had not deserved so well,"<sup>1</sup> the bill would have greatly helped protestant solidarity in the event of a Popish successor. The Parliament have done everything possible to open the nation's eyes to its danger from Charles's Popish counsellors, only attacking them openly after all their proposals had been ignored.

Ferguson now examines some of the "gracious things" said by Charles to Parliament. The most important was "the gracious Asking of Money" for supporting his unspecified alliances; it would have

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.169.

been better if he had made as well "a gracious Communication of those Alliances."<sup>1</sup> Ferguson hints that the most probable alliance Charles has made is one with Louis XIV, whom the dissolutions aid in his designs to conquer Europe, and whose pensioners fill the English Court. Parliament did offer to give money, but only if it received assurances that it would not be used to further Popery at home. Further instances of graciousness have been the request to prosecute the Plot, on which the Commons cannot be faulted, and a promise to concur in measures for the security of the protestant religion, which Charles has notably failed to fulfil.

The Declaration next complained of some unsuitable responses of the Commons to these proffers of Charles. The most important of a list of these were the votes against evil counsellors, and the vote against anticipation of the revenue. Ferguson replies that both are constitutional. The vote against an evil counsellor is used where no legal proof exists for an impeachment, as when advice has been given to the King in secret, and thus does not affect life or property. It prevents ministers whispering counsels and is a reasonable safeguard of the nation. The King ought to find the disapproval of the people's representatives sufficient reason for removing a minister. Ferguson goes into some detail on the anticipation of the revenues, not yet collected as security for loans to the King. The King should

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.169.

call Parliament if he needs extra money, as his revenue is not intended to cover extraordinary situations, such as war. This is a device to ensure regular summoning of Parliament and cement its harmony with the King, and this is rendered ineffective by the anticipations. On this point Parliament has been mild; it has only voted against anticipation of three branches of the revenue that had already been granted. Parliamentary scrutiny should prevent King and courtiers using public revenue as if it was their private purse, and scandalously wasting it. A third unsuitable return is the vote for toleration, which Ferguson defends; the Commons did not, as the Declaration suggests, try to repeal a law on their single authority, but merely hinted by the vote that it might be wise to let it drop into disuse.

Moving to the Oxford Parliament Ferguson notes; "The Declaration doth not tell us of any gracious Expressions used at the opening of that Parliament, perhaps because the store was exhausted by the abundance which His Majesty was pleased to bestow on them in his former Speeches."<sup>1</sup> The Declaration's brief dismissal of the Exclusion Bill as against honour, justice and conscience is simply reversed by Ferguson, who sees Charles's position as a conflict of duty with inclination towards a brother. The old arguments are summarised again. a new touch is that as well as duty to save his country from the horrors

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.176.

of Popery, Charles should also feel gratitude to the nation that recalled him from exile and gave him the crown. In reply to the assertion that exclusion will cause a civil war Ferguson replies that exclusion or no exclusion, England will probably have to defend herself against James, and will do so more successfully if law is on her side; this is the one extremist touch in the pamphlet.

Ferguson denies absolutely that any change is intended in the constitution despite vague and sinister hints in the Declaration. The one change that Parliament would really like is the removal of James from his brother's ear. If by accusing members of "commonwealth principles" the Declaration means republicanism, why are the men not named? If it merely means those who think kings are intended for the good of their people, this is the true English tradition. Ferguson is willing to let the people judge who are really guilty of "designing Innovations." Indeed the whole Declaration is an attempt to misrepresent the two Parliaments and make them odious to the very people who elected them, so that the conspirators about the King can continue to introduce Popery and arbitrary power undisturbed. Ferguson laments bitterly that the use of Parliaments is already laid aside. Four have been dissolved in 26 months, and even the Cavalier parliament turned against its paymaster. No wonder the ministers do not dare face another, though by refusing to meet the nation's representatives they run the risk of civil war. Ferguson ends with a rousing acceptance of the Declaration's appeal to the people:

Thus have we with an English Plainness, expressed our Thoughts of the late Parliaments and their Proceedings, as well as of the Court in Relation to them, and hope this Freedom will offend no Man. The Ministers who may be concern'd through their appealing unto the People, cannot in Justice deny unto any one of them the Liberty of weighing the Reasons which they thought fit to publish in Vindication of their Actions. But if it should prove otherwise: and these few Sheets be thought weak and full of Errours, as those we endeavour to confute, or to be held injurious unto them, we desire only to know in what we transgress, and that the Press may be open for our Justification: Let the People to whom the Appeal is made judge between them and us; and let Reason and the Law be the Rules, according to which the Controversie may be decided. 1

This is a bold claim for an appeal to public opinion, but the time had not yet come when the press could be seen as an open forum of debate, and the Whigs would no doubt have tried to stifle their opponents as they were themselves repressed. Nevertheless Ferguson and the Whig press played an important part in bringing that time nearer.

A Just and Modest Vindication of the proceedings of the Two last Parliaments is remarkable for the way Ferguson represents the Whig case as essentially moderate and reasonable, at a time when they had shown their utmost intransigence. He subjects Charles's latest Declaration to mordant irony and ridicule, picking up its words and turning them to the advantage of the Whigs; his expression has an unusual polish. He avoids being bogged down by the necessity of answering the declaration point by point, building freely on it a

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.186-187.

thorough defence of the Commons' status and actions. In this pamphlet especially can be seen the advantage of the alliance between Parliament and the press. Public opinion had been worked on for years to produce the Whig Parliaments, which then provided concrete evidence that the press had been the true voice of the people. The strength of such a combination, so admirably realised in Ferguson's pamphlet, was not easily forgotten.

(viii) Triumph of the Tory Press

Charles's ability to manage without a new Parliament, helped by the reaction from the violence of the Whigs, set the scene for a resurgence of Tory feeling. The Tory press grew in strength. The Tory newspapers were joined in February 1681 by a periodical, Heraclitus Ridens, which inculcated Tory views in a series of dialogues between two characters. L'Estrange was not idle in Scotland. On his return immediately after the Oxford Parliament, he published a reply to a collection of quotations from his own works, allegedly proving his Popery. It was entitled, Dissenters Sayings, in Requital of L'Estrange's Sayings (1681), and it contained a collection of the worst excesses of style and matter of the Puritans of the Civil War, offered as evidence of the impossibility of tolerating dissent. At the same time he started the influential Observer, another periodical in dialogue, which was to become a regular supporter of extreme Toryism in the reigns of Charles II and James II. In dialogues between various characters L'Estrange attacked the Whig press and party, and eventually

the Popish Plot, claiming Godfrey committed suicide. The paper contains all of his fanaticism and was later to embarrass moderates of his own party. He supplemented the paper with a series of pamphlets reiterating his old views in less restrained tones, even reprinting Royalist pamphlets of the Civil War, and his own Restoration works to emphasise the parallel with 1641 and the truth of his prophetic forebodings.<sup>1</sup> This mass of material is too repetitive to need discussion here, and apart from the techniques of the Observer, it adds little to L'Estrange's earlier efforts.

The Whig press continued to support the party programme as the prospect of implementing it dwindled. The government had College tried at Oxford, out of the reach of sympathetic juries, convicted and executed. Shaftesbury was arrested in the autumn of 1681, and Ferguson again came into action with the three parts of No Protestant Plot. The Whigs still controlled the London city government, and Shaftesbury escaped trial, only to flee with Ferguson to Holland, where he shortly died. The Whig newspapers continued to 1682, but then the government, with L'Estrange's expertise, found itself able to silence them all. In this year the city government also fell to Tory pressure, and the juries could no longer be relied upon. Without Parliament, without Shaftesbury and without its press, the Whig party broke up completely, leaving its remnants to perish in the Rye House prosecutions or

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Toleration Discuss'd in Two Dialogues. (1663, 3rd ed. 1681)

Monmouth's ill-fated rebellion. As well as the repression of journalism this enabled renewed persecution of the dissenters under the penal laws in perhaps the hardest drive against them in Charles's reign. The capture of the City government allowed this to be extended to the numerous London congregations. L'Estrange in the Observer encouraged the repression of the dissenters; he became the hero of the High Churchmen, who collected substantial sums of money to show their appreciation of his paper.<sup>1</sup>

### C. Conclusion

The Exclusion Crisis has several interesting features for the student of political journalism. The most important is the calculated use of the press to support a Parliamentary party and create the conditions for it to challenge royal authority. The existence of the party protected the Whig writers and provided them with material for their arguments, giving them the opportunity to influence political events. Compared with the Elizabethan puritans or the Levellers, the first Whigs had more solidity and resilience; their representation in the propertied classes and in Parliament enabled them to defy the government for two years. The development of party was to be a major importance in providing conditions for the literary figures of Queen Anne's reign to break new ground in political journalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Kitchin, Sir Roger L'Estrange, p.288, note. The total may well have been several hundred pounds.



As to the quality of what was written, it must be admitted that party had in this instance an unfortunate effect. The Whigs agreed only on exclusion, and their singlemindedness gave their pamphleteers little scope; Ferguson was the only one to show much originality in his approach to the business of argument. J.R. Jones writes; "The assumptions which the Whigs relied upon were so strongly and universally held as to be almost self-evident. All hated Popery, nearly everyone connected it with absolutism, most people had come to distrust the Court. Exclusion, and the reasons for it, could be understood by all."<sup>1</sup> This concentration was responsible for the stereotyped, repetitious content of the Whig Press. This criticism applies equally to L'Estrange, the only Tory writer of note, and for much of the Crisis practically the only Tory writer at all. He had an equally simple explanation to cover all eventualities, and one pamphlet of his is so much like another that it would be difficult to distinguish between extracts from his Restoration and Exclusion pamphlets, let alone detect any variety in the latter.

The atmosphere of tension and near-panic that pervaded the years 1678-1681 was not conducive to subtle argument or originality. Hot party spirit predominated in the press, and a few simple words sufficed to trigger off violent emotions of hate in the first Whigs and Tories, as accusations of Popery and arbitrary power jostled with those of

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<sup>1</sup> The First Whigs, p.216.

fanaticism and republicanism. Endless repetition of these familiar charges was more useful than a more realistic assessment of the political situation. Pamphleteers were ready enough to recognise what was happening, at least in their opponents. L'Estrange protested in all his pamphlets about the value of the words 'Popish' and 'Popishly affected' to the Whig pamphleteers. This remark of a dissenter, taken from a dialogue pamphlet may have been written by him:

...if there stands in my way a Monarchical Gentleman of a flourishing Reputation, I do but breath upon him, and say he is Popishly affected, and he is as soon blasted and withered as the Fig-Tree in the Gospel; it was that dear word Popery, which once before blew up Church and State, whipt off the Heads of King and Canterbury; nay there is so much Magick in it, that the very buzze of Popery will Conjure up a Presbyterian Parliament... 1

In reply the Whig writers ridiculed L'Estrange's preoccupation with the rebellion of 1641; "R.L'Estrange struck up his Fiddle, and play'd us the Old Tune of Fourty one."<sup>2</sup> "Well, this Fourty one is *Θεός ὡς ἄνθρωπος*, excellent at a dead lift. 'Tis a Fac totum, the Philosophers stone, a Panaceaia, 'tis good for everything."<sup>3</sup> Despite such critical awareness each party merely inverted their opponent's accusations, and remained guilty of the technique they condemned.

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<sup>1</sup> A Dialogue Between the Pope and a Phanatick, Concerning Affairs in England (1680) p.9.

<sup>2</sup> A Tory Plot (1682), p.7.

<sup>3</sup> The Charge of a Tory Plot Maintain'd (1682), p.20.

If neither party had a writer of sufficient stature to break out of this kind of controversy, both had pamphleteers whose competence in the task they set themselves cannot be questioned. One important contribution they had to make to political journalism was the excellently clear prose in which the best of them wrote, contributing to the general development of English prose in the latter part of the seventeenth century. Here L'Estrange is prominent; he wrote prose of a new ease and directness, colloquial and vigorous, that leads the way to that of Swift and Defoe. His work as a translator is justly praised for its stylistic excellence, but the same qualities can be found in his political writings. He was not alone in this ability; Marvell's pamphlets established him as a model of prose style, whom Swift was to look back to with admiration. Ferguson wrote simply with Restoration polish, proving that the Church could not claim a monopoly of good writers. In general, with a few notable exceptions, such as Settle, the pamphleteers aimed with uniformity at a neutral style, admirably suited to reaching a wide audience.

I feel that the political journalism of the Civil War played its part in bringing this change about, despite the reluctance of post-Restoration writers to recognise the fact. Neither Whig nor Tory acknowledged any debt to the vast pamphlet literature of the Civil War, either in method or ideas, though the Whigs borrowed freely from the arguments of the Parliamentarians. L'Estrange in particular preferred to draw attention to the strain of biblical language and extravagant

emotion to be found in puritan writers rather than their equally characteristic plainness of style. In his Restoration pamphlets he maintained that the style of the "fanatics" was uneducated, over-emotional and absurd in its strained metaphors, illustrating his contention with his usual collection of quotations. The Restoration pamphleteers preferred to see as their model the urbane, sophisticated manner of the gentleman rather than the godly language of the puritan, but we can now recognise the continuity between the two periods. The excesses of the Interregnum disappeared, but the style of its basic popular journalism influenced not only future pamphleteers, but in and through them English prose as a whole.

The alliance of the press with a Parliamentary party, and the general use of a simple, direct style of prose are the most important contribution of the Exclusion Crisis to political journalism. It marked an intermediate stage, in the history of politics and pamphleteering alike, between the Civil War; which its violence at times resembled, and the developed party strife of the reigns of William III and Anne. If its productions are perhaps disappointing in comparison with those of other periods, we shall see how the possibilities inherent in the party system and the new prose were to be developed, creating one of the great ages of political journalism.

