

*John Milton (1644)*

*William Altoft (2018)*

They, who to states and governors of the Commonwealth direct their speech, High Court of Parliament, or, wanting such access in a private condition, write that which they foresee may advance the public good; I suppose them, as at the beginning of no mean endeavour, not a little altered and moved inwardly in their minds: some with doubt of what will be the success, others with fear of what will be the censure; some with hope, others with confidence of what they have to speak. And me perhaps each of these dispositions, as the subject was whereon I entered, may have at other times variously affected; and likely might in these foremost expressions now also disclose which of them swayed most, but that the very attempt of this address thus made, and the thought of whom it hath recourse to, hath got the power within me to a passion, far more welcome than incidental to a preface.

Consider, High Court of Parliament, those who take it upon themselves to speak to governors and to states, or those who wish for privacy and thus write, instead, whatever they can which they believe will advance the public good. I believe these people must be significantly altered and moved within their minds for them to begin such an extraordinary task. Some beset by fear of failure, and others by fear of what disapproval may come. Some moved with hope, and others with confidence in what they have to write or say. And as I approached this subject, perhaps I was beset and moved by each of these at various times, and I could begin, in these opening lines, by describing which of them influenced me the most. But simply the act of beginning my address, and the thought of whom it offers an alternative to, has driven the desire within me to a passion – a passion very welcome to this preface.

Which though I stay not to confess ere any ask, I shall be blameless, if it be no other that the joy and gratulation which it brings to all who wish and promote their country's liberty; whereof this whole discourse proposed will be a certain testimony, if not a trophy. For this is not the liberty which we can hope, that no grievance ever should arise in the Commonwealth – that let no man in this world expect; but when complaints are freely heard, deeply considered and speedily reformed, then is the utmost bound of civil liberty attained that wise men look for. To which if I now manifest by the very sound of this which I shall utter, that we are already in good part

I do not speak simply to perform my passion, but I shall be blameless if this does nothing more than bring joy to and show solidarity with those who desire their country's freedom, and fight for it. This shall be a testimony to them and to that freedom, even if not ultimately a trophy of victory. The idea that no complaint or outrage should ever surface or be felt in the Commonwealth: this is not a liberty we can hope for, and let nobody expect it. A society where complaints are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily addressed: now that is the highest reach of civil liberty that the wise of us look for. My very words at this very moment are

arrived, and yet from such a steep disadvantage of tyranny and superstition grounded into our principles as was beyond the manhood of a Roman recovery, it will be attributed first, as is most due, to the strong assistance of God our deliverer, next to your faithful guidance and undaunted wisdom, Lords and Commons of England. Neither is it in God's esteem the diminution of his glory, when honourable things are spoken of good men and worthy magistrates; which if I now first should begin to do, after so fair a progress of your laudable deeds, and such a long obligation upon the whole realm to your indefatigable virtues, I might be justly reckoned among the tardiest, and the unwillingest of them that praise ye.

Nevertheless there being three principal things, without which all praising is but courtship and flattery: First, when that only is praised which is solidly worth praise: next, when greatest likelihoods are brought that such things are truly and really in those persons to whom they are ascribed: the other, when he who praises, by showing that such his actual persuasion is of whom he writes, can demonstrate that he flatters not; the former two of these I have heretofore endeavoured, rescuing the employment from him who went about to impair your merits with a trivial and malignant encomium; the latter as belonging chiefly to mine own acquittal, that whom I so extolled I did not flatter, hath been reserved opportunely to this occasion.

For he who freely magnifies what hath been nobly done, and fears not to declare as freely what might be

the evidence of how close to this we have come. That progress began with the steepest disadvantage, our principles infused with tyranny and superstition, and it is thanks to God's assistance first of all, followed by your faithful guidance and unfailing wisdom, Lords and Commons of England, that we have come so far. God shall not consider his honour diminished when the good and worthy are so honourably and closely compared to him. And if I begin to speak of your honour only now, after all your praiseworthy deeds, and after so much benefit given us all, tirelessly, by you, then I might fairly be placed among the slowest and most unwilling of your champions.

Nevertheless, there are three crucial things that must be followed, to prevent one's praise from simply being courtship and flattery. Firstly, only the fully deserving should be praised – it must not be given easily to anyone and anything. Secondly, one must be convinced that the praise is accurate, and really, truly does apply. Finally, the praise-giver must prove it is not flattery by demonstrating that they know their subject well. I have tried before to achieve those first two, by denouncing any who would insult you with empty and poisonous praise. The third – demonstrating that I do not seek to flatter you – is mine yet to prove, saved for this perfect opportunity.

For the one who gives the clearest promise of loyalty is the one who will stand and applaud, and

done better, gives ye the best covenant of his fidelity; and that his loyalest affection and his hope waits on your proceedings. His highest praising is not flattery, and his plainest advice is a kind of praising. For though I should affirm and hold by argument, that it would fare better with truth, with learning and the Commonwealth, if one of your published Orders, which I should name, were called in; yet at the same time it could not but much redound to the lustre of your mild and equal government, whenas private persons are hereby animated to think ye better pleased with public advice, than other statists have been delighted heretofore with public flattery. And men will then see what difference there is between the magnanimity of a triennial Parliament, and that jealous haughtiness of prelates and cabin counsellors that usurped of late, whenas they shall observe ye in the midst of your victories and successes more gently brooking written exceptions against a voted Order than other courts, which had produced nothing worth memory but the weak ostentation of wealth, would have endured the least signified dislike at any sudden proclamation.

If I should thus far presume upon the meek demeanour of your civil and gentle greatness, Lords and Commons, as what your published Order hath directly said, that to gainsay, I might defend myself with ease, if any should accuse me of being new or insolent, did they but know how much better I find ye esteem it to imitate the old and elegant humanity of Greece, than the barbaric pride of a Hunnish and Norwegian stateliness. And out of those ages, to whose polite wisdom and letters we owe that we are

then not be too afraid to stay standing and lay out all their criticisms – that is a sincere ally. With them, the highest praise is not just flattery, and the most blunt advice becomes a kind of praise. I am going to insist and argue that it would better for truth, for learning, and for the Commonwealth, if one of your published Orders were reversed. Yet in doing so, I will not be able to avoid reflecting the quality of your government, when you are seen to take more pleasure in hearing advice from your public than other courts have taken in absorbing pure public flattery. Then all will see the differences between a generous and patient parliament, and the kind of arrogant and insecure bishops and counsellors we have known. They, who produced nothing worth remembering besides shallow shows of wealth, and are the weakest in the face of criticism, can join all in observing you humble and tolerant in the face of criticism, even in the midst of your victories and successes.

Assuming that I will continue to be indulged, Lords and Commons, by your civility and politeness, I shall contradict that which your published Order states. If any were to hear that and accuse me of being some insolent upstart, I might defend myself with ease by letting them know how much better I find you when you imitate the old and elegant humanity of Greece, rather than the uncivil and insecure pride of a Hun-like or Norwegian stateliness. We owe the wisdom and the letters of

not yet Goths and Jutlanders, I could name him who from his private house wrote that discourse to the Parliament of Athens, that persuades them to change the form of democracy which was then established. Such honour was done in those days to men who professed the study of wisdom and eloquence, not only in their own country, but in other lands, that cities and signiories heard them gladly, and with great respect, if they had aught in public to admonish the state. Thus did Dion Prusaesus, a stranger and a private orator, counsel the Rhodians against a former edict; and I abound with other examples, which to set here would be superfluous.

But if from the industry of a life wholly dedicated to studious labours, and those natural endowments haply not the worst for two and fifty degrees of northern latitude, so much must be derogated, as to count me not equal to any of those who had this privilege, I would obtain to be thought not so inferior, as yourselves are superior to the most of them who received their counsel; and how far you excel them, be assured, Lords and Commons, there can be no greater testimony appear, than when your prudent spirit acknowledges and obeys the voice of reason from what quarter soever it be heard speaking; and renders ye as willing to repeal any Act of your own setting forth, as any set forth by your predecessors.

that Ancient Greece, for giving us the chance to be more than Goths and Jutlanders. Out of those times, I could name he who wrote, from his private home, to the parliament of Athens, persuading them to change the form of their established democracy. This was a time when such honour was given to those who demonstrated wisdom and eloquence, at home and abroad – so much so that, if they had anything with which to publicly, and stridently, criticise the state, cities and their elites listened gladly, and with respect. That is how Dion Prusaesus, a stranger and a private speaker, counselled the Rhodians against one of their own Orders. The many other examples I might give here to show this would only be superfluous.

My life and work has been wholly dedicated to study, and my natural talents for it are, fortunately, not dampened by the cold of our climate. But if so much of that is to be belittled to the point where I am considered as less deserving of the freedom of expression held by those private speakers of Ancient Greece, then I would fight to be considered just as deserving as they are, just as you, yourselves, are rightly seen as superior to most of those whom they counselled. And by just how much you exceed them, Lords and Commons, there is no greater sign than when your far-sighted spirit hears and listens to the voice of reason, no matter who or where it comes from, and when you are just as willing to act on that advice and go back on one of your own Acts or Orders, as you are to repeal any set by your predecessors.

If ye be thus resolved, as it were injury to think ye were not, I know not what should withhold me from presenting ye with a fit instance wherein to show both that love of truth which ye eminently profess, and that uprightness of your judgement which is not wont to be partial to yourselves; by judging over again that Order which ye have ordained to regulate printing: – that no book, pamphlet, or paper shall be henceforth printed, unless the same be first approved and licensed by such, or at least one of such, as shall be thereto appointed. For that part which preserves justly every man’s copy to himself, or provides for the poor, I touch not, only wish they be not made pretences to abuse and persecute honest and painful men, who offend not in either of these particulars. But that other clause of licensing books, which we thought had died with his brother quadragesimal and matrimonial when the prelates expired, I shall now attend with such a homily, as shall lay before ye, first the inventors of it to be those whom ye will be loath to own; next what is to be thought in general of reading, whatever sort the books be; and that this Order avails nothing to the suppressing of scandalous, seditious, and libellous books, which were mainly intended to be suppressed. Last, that it will be primely to the discouragement of all learning, and the stop of truth, not only by disexercising and blunting our abilities in what we know already, but by hindering and cropping the discovery that might be yet further made both in religious and civil wisdom.

Now, if my characterisation of you is correct, and it would be an insult to assume otherwise, then I cannot think of anything that ought stop me from giving you a perfect opportunity to show that love of truth which you sing so supremely of, and to show your based and unbiased judgement, that is not prone to side with yourselves. That opportunity is this: review the Order you have put out that demands the regulation of printing. The Order which states that, from here on, no book, pamphlet, or article may be printed without being first approved of and licensed by those appointed to do so. Some of the better elements of it, I do not touch –the part that protects each writer’s copyright, for example, or provides for the poor. I only wish that they are not used as a cover under which the persecution and abuse of the honest and the innocent can take place. But that other clause of licensing books, this thing which we thought had died along with its religious brothers and sisters when the bishops expired, I will address with a sermon of my own. Firstly, I will lay out the inventors of this censorious behaviour, with whom you will be very reluctant to be grouped. Secondly, to discuss what can and should be thought about reading in general, beyond any specific content. Then, I will show that this Order is of no use in the fight to suppress offensive, inciting, and misrepresentative books – the very texts it is intended for. Finally, to argue that this Order will, more than anything else, discourage learning and stop truth – not only by making us intellectually lazy and less sure of what we know already, but by hindering and limiting any and all potential further

I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors. For books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous dragon's teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life. 'Tis true, no age can restore a life, whereof perhaps there is no great loss; and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse.

discoveries we might make, both in religious and in civil wisdom.

I do not deny that there should be great concern in the Church and Commonwealth to keep a watchful eye on how books, as well as people, can bring shame upon themselves, and how they should face judge and jury, with sharp judgement brought on them for their responsibility. For books are not absolutely dead things. They contain a power of life within them that makes them as active as those whom they are the children of – no, they in fact preserve the purest extract of the capability of the living mind that made them, as if stored in a glass bottle. I know that they may act as lively and as productively as those fabled dragon's teeth: teeth that, when scattered across the ground, may cause the sprouting up of armed men. And yet, despite the danger, unless caution is used the destruction of a good book is little different to killing a man. One who kills a person kills a creature with the capacity for reason – destroys a reflection of God's image. But one who kills a book kills reason itself – destroys the very image of God that is held in the mind. A good book is the precious life-blood of a spirit that transcends the earth-bound human being, and must be secured and treasured for its immortal purpose. It is true that no amount of time can restore a life: perhaps this is not, ultimately, a great loss. It is also true that generations over the course of history rarely manage to recover a lost and rejected truth: in the face of this kind of loss, whole nations are hurt and hindered.

We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man, preserved and stored up in books; since we see a kind of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom, and if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre; whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at that ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself, slays an immortality rather than a life. But lest I should be condemned of introducing license, while I oppose licensing, I refuse not the pains to be so much historical, as will serve to show what hath been done by ancient and famous commonwealths against this disorder, till the very time that this project of licensing crept out of the Inquisition, was caught up by our prelates, and hath caught some of our presbyters.

In Athens, where books and wits were ever busier than in any other part of Greece, I find but only two sorts of writings which the magistrate cared to take notice of; those either blasphemous and atheistical, or libellous. Thus the books of Protagoras were by the judges of Aeropagus commanded to be burnt, and himself banished the territory for a discourse begun with his confessing not to know whether there were gods, or whether not. And against defaming, it was decreed that none should be traduced by name, as was the manner of Vetus Comoedia, whereby we may guess how they censured libelling. And this course was quick enough, as Cicero writes, to quell both the desperate wits of other atheists, and the open way of

And so, we should be wary of what we raise up and use against the living work of public people, of how we destroy the life of a person that had been protected and preserved within a book. This way a kind of murder may be done, sometimes a martyrdom, and, if our actions extend to the whole of a person's body of work, then a kind of massacre. The execution has gone beyond the ending of a physical life, and has struck at that spirit essence, at the breath of reason itself, and ended an immortality rather than merely a life. But, to make it clear I oppose licensing and avoid misunderstanding or misrepresentation, I will now put in the historical effort to show how ancient and famous commonwealths have dealt with this issue, right up until the time in history when this mission of licensing survived beyond the Inquisition, and was caught and taken up by our bishops and our ministers.

In Athens, where books and minds were always busier than in any other part of Greece, I can see that only two sorts of writings ever took the attention of the judges: writings against religion, and slander and libel. That is how, up on Aeropagus, the books of Protagoras were sentenced to burning, and he himself was banished from the territory, all because he began a discourse with a confession: that he did not know whether or not there were gods. And with slander, it was declared that none should be defamed or mocked by name, which was the style of older parts of Greek comedy. We can guess how they went about censoring libel. As Cicero writes, it was

defaming, as the event showed. Of other sects and opinions, though tending to voluptuousness, and the denying of divine Providence, they took no heed.

Therefore we do not read that either Epicurus, or that libertine school of Cyrene, or what the Cynic impudence uttered, was ever questioned by the laws. Neither is it recorded that the writings of those old comedians were suppressed, though the acting of them were forbid; and that Plato commended the reading of Aristophanes, the loosest of them all, to his royal scholar Dionysius, is commonly known, and may be excused, if holy Chrysostom, as is reported, nightly studied so much the same author and had the art to cleanse a scurrilous vehemence into the style of a rousing sermon.

That other leading city of Greece, Lacedaemon, considering that Lycurgus their lawgiver was so addicted to elegant learning, as to have been the first that brought out of Ionia the scattered works of Homer, and sent the poet Thales from Crete to prepare and mollify the Spartan surliness with his smooth songs and odes, the better to plant among them law and civility, it is to be wondered how museless and unbookish they were, minding nought but the fears of war. There needed no licensing of books among them, for they disliked all but their own laconic apophthegms, and took a slight occasion to

clear that the methods used were quick and efficient both to silence the thinking of other atheists, and to stop the trend of open defamation. Yet other groups and their opinions were overlooked or ignored, despite being often just as offensive, and denying, also, the gods.

So we do not read that Epicurus, or the freethinkers of Cyrene, nor the scepticism they uttered, were ever questioned by the law. It is also not recorded that the writings of those old comedians were ever censored, only that performing them was forbidden. It is well known that Plato even recommended reading Aristophanes, the loosest of all of them, to Dionysius, his royal scholar. That can be forgiven if it is true that Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople, read Aristophanes too, nightly, and managed to take the passionate and insulting humour and transform it into the style of a rousing sermon.

Then there is Lacedaemon, that other leading city of Greece. Their lawgiver, Lycurgus, was addicted to elegant learning: he was the first to have brought the scattered works of Homer out of Ionia, and he sent the poet Thales of Crete to pacify the hot-headed Spartans with his smooth songs and odes, the better to plant the seeds of law and civility among them. And so it is a wonder how uninspired and unbookish they were, with their minds occupied only with the fear of war. There was no need for the licensing of books in Lacedaemon, for they disliked all except their own

## Areopagitica

chase Archilochus out of their city, perhaps for composing in a higher strain than their own soldierly ballads and roundels could reach to. Or if it were for his broad verses, they were not therein so cautious but they were as dissolute in their promiscuous conversing; whence Euripides affirms in *Andromache*, that their women were all unchaste. Thus much may give us light after what sort of books were prohibited among the Greeks.

The Romans also, for many ages trained up only to a military roughness resembling most of the Lacedaemonian guise, knew of learning little but what their twelve Tables, and the Pontific College with their augurs and flamens taught them in religion and law; so unacquainted with other learning, that when Carneades and Critolaus, with the Stoic Diogenes, coming ambassadors to Rome, took thereby occasion to give the city a taste of their philosophy, they were suspected for seducers by no less a man than Cato the Censor, who moved it in the Senate to dismiss them speedily, and to banish all such Attic babblers out of Italy. But Scipio and others of the noblest senators withstood him and his old Sabine austerity; honoured and admired the men; and the censor himself at last, in his old age, fell to the study of that whereof before he was scrupulous. And yet at the same time Naevius and Plautus, the first Latin comedians, had filled the city with all the borrowed scenes of Menander and Philemon. Then began to be considered there also what was to be done to libellous books and authors; for Naevius was quickly cast into prison for his

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

concise and simple proverbs, taking only one rare occasion to chase the poet Archilochus out of the city. Perhaps he composed something reaching too high for their soldierly ballads and poems to match. Or if he were chased out for his vulgar verses, the people of the city were not as careful or prudent in their actual sexuality: Euripides insists, in his tragic play *Andromache*, that their women were all far from pure. This all gives us an idea of what kind of books were and were not banned among the Greeks.

The Romans, too, were for a long time just as military and unbookish as the Lacedaemonians, knowing nearly nothing beyond their Twelve Tables of law, and the religious lecturing of the Catholic priests. They were so kept within their limited bubble of learning, that when three philosophers came to Rome as ambassadors from Greece – Carneades, Critolaus, and Diogenes – they were denounced as the seductive spreaders of dangerous ideas by Cato the Censor, who urged the Senate to kick them and any other babbling Greeks back out of Rome, and quickly. But Scipio and some of the more noble senators held Cato and his old-fashioned strictness off, and admired and honoured the ambassadors. And the censor himself, in his old age, even fell to studying that which he was so doubtful of. Yet at the same time as this victory for the freedom of expression, the first Latin comedians, Naevius and Plautus, had spread throughout the city their adaptations of works by the Greeks Menander and Philemon. So Rome began to consider what should be done

## Areopagitica

unbridled pen, and released by the tribunes upon his recantation; we read also that libels were burnt, and the makers punished by Augustus. The like severity, no doubt, was used, if aught were impiously written against their esteemed gods. Except in these two points, how the world went in books, the magistrate kept no reckoning.

And therefore Lucretius without impeachment versifies his Epicurism to Memmius, and had the honour to be set forth the second time by Cicero, so great a father of the Commonwealth; although himself disputes against that opinion in his own writings. Nor was the satirical sharpness or naked plainness of Lucilius, or Catullus, or Flaccus, by any order prohibited. And for matters of state, the story of Titus Livius, though it extolled that part which Pompey held, was not therefore suppressed by Octavius Caesar of the other faction. But that Naso was by him banished in his old age, for the wanton poems of his youth, was but a mere covert of state over some secret cause: and besides, the books were neither banished nor called in. From hence we shall meet with little else but tyranny in the Roman empire, that we may not marvel, if not so often bad as good books were silenced. I shall therefore deem to have been large enough, in producing what among the ancients was punishable to write; save only which, all other arguments were free to treat on.

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

about slanderous books and authors. We read that Naeivius was quickly cast into prison for his free, unhampered pen, only released when he took back his words, and that any works of slander were burned, with punishment from Augustus awaiting their authors. No doubt this was also the reaction to anything disrespectful to their treasured gods. Again, beyond slander and blasphemy, the courts cared not how the world went in books.

And so Lucretius could freely share his Epicurean philosophy with a Roman audience through his poetry, which was recorded for us all by no less a man than Cicero – even though Cicero argues against that philosophy in his own writings. Lucilis, Catullus, Flaccus: three more writers and poets who wrote sharp satire and spoke unabashed and unafraid and yet were never stopped by any orders. And matters touching on state and politics? Work by Titus Livius, the Roman historian, was not suppressed by Octavius Caesar, despite it praising the role played by Caesar's enemy, Pompey the Great. It is true that the same Caesar banished the poet Naso in his old age for the outrageous poems of his youth, but this was only the official reason used to cover up some state secret that was the true cause. Besides, the books that contained the material were neither banished nor recalled. After this point in history, we will find little else but tyranny from the Roman Empire, and so we should not wonder if we find books good and bad silenced in equal measure. I shall therefore consider myself to have been detailed enough on what writing the

By this time the emperors were become Christians, whose discipline in this point I do not find to have been more severe than what was formerly in practice. The books of those whom they took to be grand heretics were examined, refuted, and condemned in the general Councils; and not till then were prohibited, or burnt, by authority of the emperor. As for the writings of heathen authors, unless they were plain invectives against Christianity, as those of Porphyrius and Proclus, they met with no interdict that can be cited, till about the year 400, in a Carthaginian Council, wherein bishops themselves were forbid to read the books of Gentiles, but heresies they might read: while others long before them, on the contrary, scrupled more the books of heretics than of Gentiles. And that the primitive Councils and bishops were wont only to declare what books were not commendable, passing no further, but leaving it to each one's conscience to read or to lay by, till after the year 800, is observed already by Padre Paolo, the great unmasker of the Trentine Council.

After which time the Popes of Rome, engrossing what they pleased of political rule into their own hands, extended their dominion over men's eyes, as they had before over their judgements, burning and prohibiting

ancients deemed punishable, whilst they let all arguments else continue on freely.

And now the emperors were become Christians. But at this point in time, I do not find the practice of the Christians on this issue of censorship to be any more severe than what had gone before. They took the books of those whom they considered heretics and examined them, refuted them, and condemned them in their Councils – only after this were those books banned, or burnt, by authority of the emperor. The writings of non-Christian authors went by unprohibited, unless they were plain insults and challenges to Christianity, like the works of Porphyrius and Proclus. This changed in the year 400, at a Council of Carthage: but this change was to ban bishops themselves from reading these non-Christian works, though they still read works of heresy against their faith. Contrary to this, long before them, bishops had been more fearful of works of heresy against Christianity than of the works of other religions. We already know, from the work of Padre Paolo, who exposed the Council of Trent, that these earlier Councils and bishops only declared what was denounced by the Church and went no further, leaving up to the conscience of each the decision of whether to read a work or set it aside. At least, this was the way until after the year 800.

After that time, the Popes of Rome began lapping up freely more and more political power and extending their reach to cover now the eyes of their subjects, as an extension of church control

to be read what they fancied not; yet sparing in their censures, and the books not many which they so dealt with: till Martin V., by his bull, not only prohibited, but was the first that excommunicated the reading of heretical books; for about that time Wickliffe and Huss, growing terrible, were they who first drove the Papal Court to a stricter policy of prohibiting. Which course Leo X. and his successors followed, until the Council of Trent and the Spanish Inquisition engendering together brought forth, or perfected, those Catalogues and expurging Indexes, that rake through the entrails of many an old good author, with a violation worse than any could be offered to his tomb. Nor did they stay in matters heretical, but any subject that was not to their palate, they either condemned in a Prohibition, or had it straight into the new purgatory of an index.

To fill up the measure of encroachment, that their last invention was to ordain that no book, pamphlet, or paper should be printed (as if St. Peter had bequeathed them the keys of the press also out of Paradise) unless it were approved and licensed under the hands of two or three glutton friars.

For example:

over their minds and judgements. Now that which they did not like was banned and burnt. Yet even then, they did not deal with so many books, and kept some measure of limit to their censoring.

Until Pope Martin V., that is, who issued commands that did more than merely ban certain books: he was the first to excommunicate the very reading of heretical books. It was the threat of the reformers Wickliffe and Huss that drove the Papal Court to a stricter policy of prohibiting. A course that Pope Leo X. and his successors followed, until the Council of Trent and the Spanish Inquisition came terribly together to create, or at least perfect, catalogues and indexes of prohibited books, that could ransack and pillage through the legacy left by many an author – a violation worse than any graverobber could offer to those author's tombs. And they did not limit themselves to heresy any longer. Any matter or subject they did not like, they either condemned by prohibition, or sent it straight into the new purgatory that was a spot in the index.

And to complete their intrusive expansion, their final move was to ordain that no book, pamphlet, or paper was to be printed unless it had first been given the seal of approval by two or three indulgent friars – as if St. Peter had entrusted them with the keys, not only to Paradise, but to the printing press too. Take this exchange, for example:

Areopagitica

*Let the Chancellor Cini be pleased to see if in this present work be contained aught that may withstand the printing.*

VINCENT RABBATTA, Vicar of Florence.

*I have seen this present work, and find nothing athwart the Catholic faith and good manners: in witness whereof I have given, etc.*

NICOLO GINI, Chancellor of Florence.

*Attending the precedent relation, it is allowed that this present work of Davanzati may be printed.*

VINCENT RABBATTA, etc.

*It may be printed, July 15.*

FRIAR SIMON MOMPEI D'AMELIA, Chancellor of the Holy Office in Florence.

Sure they have a conceit, if he of the bottomless pit had not long since broke prison, that this quadruple exorcism would bar him down. I fear their next design will be to get into their custody the licensing of that which they say Claudius intended, but went not through with. Vouchsafe to see another of their forms, the Roman stamp:

*Imprimatur, If it seem good to the reverend Master of the Holy Palace.*

BELCASTRO, Vicegerent.

*Imprimatur, Friar Nicolo Rodolphi, Master of the Holy Palace.*

Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

*Let the Chancellor Cini be pleased to see if in this present work be contained aught that may withstand the printing.*

VINCENT RABBATTA, Vicar of Florence.

*I have seen this present work, and find nothing athwart the Catholic faith and good manners: in witness whereof I have given, etc.*

NICOLO GINI, Chancellor of Florence.

*Attending the precedent relation, it is allowed that this present work of Davanzati may be printed.*

VINCENT RABBATTA, etc.

*It may be printed, July 15.*

FRIAR SIMON MOMPEI D'AMELIA, Chancellor of the Holy Office in Florence.

It is clear that they have this notion that Satan himself would be locked back up again by this little back and forth of theirs, if he of the bottomless pit had just broken free. I am afraid their next move will be to gather up all that which Claudius allowed and then to censor and license it, claiming that he had intended to do so all along. Let yourselves see here, on another form, the Roman stamp of *Imprimatur* – “Let it be printed”:

*Imprimatur, If it seem good to the reverend Master of the Holy Palace.*

BELCASTRO, Vicegerent.

*Imprimatur, Friar Nicolo Rodolphi, Master of the Holy Palace.*

Sometimes five Imprimaturs are seen together dialogue-wise in the piazza of one title page, complimenting and ducking each to other with their shaven reverences, whether the author, who stands by in perplexity at the foot of his epistle, shall to the press or to the sponge.

These are the pretty responsories, these are the dear antiphonies, that so bewitched of late our prelates and their chaplains with the goodly echo they made; and besotted us to the gay imitation of a lordly Imprimatur, one from Lambeth House, another from the west end of Paul's; so apishly Romanizing, that the word of command still was set down in Latin; as if the learned grammatical pen that wrote it would cast no ink without Latin; or perhaps, as they thought, because no vulgar tongue was worthy to express the pure conceit of an Imprimatur, but rather, as I hope, for that our English, the language of men ever famous and foremost in the achievements of liberty, will not easily find servile letters enow to spell such a dictatory presumption English.

And thus ye have the inventors and the original of book-licensing ripped up and drawn as lineally as any pedigree. We have it not, that can be heard of, from any ancient state, or polity or church; nor by any statute left us by our ancestors elder or later; nor from the modern custom of any reformed city or church abroad, but from the most anti-Christian council and the most tyrannous inquisition that ever

Sometimes five of these Imprimaturs are found as if in dialogue in the piazza that is a title page, complimenting and bowing to each other with their holy shaven heads, discussing whether the authors – who stand in suspense at the end of their works – are destined for the press or for cleansing.

This is the wondrous call and response of Christian choir that has so bewitched our clergy lately, enchanted by the goodly echo they made, and had us captivated by the playful imitation by our bishops and archbishops of a lordly Roman stamp of permission, from Lambeth House to the west end of St. Paul's. Such pathetic Romanising, that the commands were still set down in Latin, as if no serious and learned pen that dared write could cast ink in any other language. Or perhaps they recognised that no common tongue was good enough to fully express the smug self-satisfaction of an Imprimatur. Rather I hope the reason is that our English, the language of those famous and foremost in freedom, cannot easily be turned to spelling out such dictatorial and disrespectful language.

And there you have the original book-licensing and its inventors torn up and laid out as clear and linear as a family tree. As far as one can see, we do not get this licensing from any ancient state, or government, or church, nor from any law left us by our ancestors, distant or recent. Nor do we get it from the modern ways of reformed cities or from churches abroad. Instead, we get it from the most

inquired. Til then books were ever as freely admitted into the world as any other birth; the issue of the brain was no more stifled than the issue of the womb; no envious Juno sat cross-legged over the nativity of any man's intellectual offspring; but if it proved a monster, who denies, but that it was justly burnt, or sunk into the sea? But that a book, in worse condition than a peccant soul, should be to stand before a jury ere it be born to the world, and undergo yet in darkness the judgement of Radamant and his colleagues, ere it can pass the ferry backward into the light, was never heard before, till that mysterious iniquity, provoked and troubled at the first entrance of Reformation, sought out new limbos and new hells wherein they might include our books also within the number of their damned. And this was the rare morsel so officiously snatched up, and so ill-favouredly imitated by our inquisiturient bishops, and the attendant minorities their chaplains. That ye like not now these most certain authors of this licensing order, and that all sinister intention was far distant from your thoughts, when ye were importuned the passing it, all men who know the integrity of your actions, and how ye honour truth, will clear ye readily.

But some will say, what though the inventors were bad, the thing for all that may be good? It may so; yet if that thing be no such deep invention, but obvious, and easy for any man to light on, and yet best and

anti-Christian council and the most tyrannous inquisition that ever inquired. Until then, books were as freely admitted into the world as any other birth, and the matter of the brain was nor more stifled than the matter of the womb. Unlike Juno interfering any way she might with the birth of Hercules, there was no jealous wife sitting cross-legged over the nativity of any person's intellectual offspring. Yet who could deny that when it proved a monster, it was still justly burnt or sunk into the sea? That a book, regarded worse than a sinful soul, could be stood before a jury prior to being born into the world, and then assessed, in darkness, by the judges of Hades before it might be granted ferry-passage into the light: this was unheard of. That is, until that mysterious evil, the Church of Rome, provoked and scared by the first signs of Reformation, decided to invent new hells and limbos into which they could throw our books and add them to the number of their damned. This rare morsel of opportunity they snatched up so completely, and were so hideously imitated by our inquisitor-aspiring bishops, and the Franciscan friars. All those that know the integrity of your actions and how you honour truth will clear your name readily, knowing that you are not like these particular authors of licensing orders, and that, unlike them, sinister intention was far from your thoughts when you passed yours.

But some will say: so the inventors were bad, what does that matter if the thing itself could be good for all? Well that may be a fair question. Yet if that thing is not a hidden invention but an obvious one,

wisest commonwealths through all ages and occasions have forborne to use it, and falsest seducers and oppressors of men were the first who took it up, and to no other purpose but to obstruct and hinder the first approach of Reformation; I am of those who believe it will be a harder alchemy than Lullius ever knew, to sublimate any good use out of such an invention. Yet this only is what I request to gain from this reason, that it may be held a dangerous and suspicious fruit, as certainly it deserves, for the tree that bore it, until I can dissect one by one the properties it has. But I have first to finish, as was propounded, what is to be thought in general of reading books, whatever sort they be, and whether be more the benefit or the harm that thence proceeds.

Not to insist upon the examples of Moses, Daniel, and Paul, who were skilful in all the learning of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Greeks, which could not probably be without reading their books of all sorts; in Paul especially, who thought it no defilement to insert into Holy Scripture the sentences of three Greek poets, and one of them a tragedian; the question was notwithstanding sometimes controverted among the primitive doctors, but with great odds on that side which affirmed it both lawful and profitable; as was then evidently perceived, when Julian the Apostate and subtlest enemy to our faith made a decree forbidding Christians the study of heathen learning: for, said he, they wound us with our own weapons, and with our own arts and sciences they overcome us.

easy for anyone to discover, but all the best and wisest societies throughout the ages have avoided using it whilst the most deceitful seducers and oppressors were the first to take it up, and for no other purpose than to block and to hinder the beginnings of the Reformation... well, then I am one of those who believe that extracting any good out of this invention will be a magic much harder to perform than any the alchemist Lullius ever tried. All I seek from this argument is that this thing be considered a dangerous and suspicious fruit, as it certainly deserves given the tree that bore it, until I can take it apart and examine each of its properties. But I first have to finish, as I laid out earlier, discussing what can and should be thought about reading in general, regardless of content, and to weigh up the benefits and the harm that may or may not result.

Take Moses, Daniel, and Paul, who were well-versed in the teaching of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Greeks: this could not very likely be so if they did not read books of all sorts and origins. Paul especially, who had no problem with inserting the words of three Greek poets – and one of them a tragedian – into the Holy Scripture. Despite these high examples, the question of whether this wide-reading and outside inspiration was good or bad was still debated among the early elders, though always with the majority regarding it not only allowable, but profitable – something clearly realised by the ex-Christian nephew of Constantine, Julian the Apostate, the most subtle enemy of our faith. He banned Christians from

And indeed the Christians were put so to their shifts by this crafty means, and so much in danger to decline into all ignorance, that the two Apollinarii were fain, as a man may say, to coin all the seven liberal sciences out of the Bible, reducing it into divers forms of orations, poems, dialogues, even to the calculating of a new Christian grammar. But, saith the historian Socrates, the providence of God provided better than the industry of Apollinarius and his son, by taking away that illiterate law with the life of him who devised it. So great an injury they then held it to be deprived of Hellenic learning; and thought it a persecution more undermining, and secretly decaying the Church, than the open cruelty of Decius or Diocletian.

And perhaps it was the same politic drift that the devil whipped St. Jerome in a lenten dream, for reading Cicero; or else it was a phantasm bred by the fever which had then seized him. For had an angel been his discipliner, unless it were for dwelling too much upon Ciceronianisms, and had chastised the reading, not the vanity, it had been plainly partial; first to correct him for grave Cicero, and not for scurril Plautus, whom he confesses to have been reading, not long before; next to correct him only, and let so many more ancient fathers wax old in those pleasant and florid studies without the lash of such a tutoring

studying anything outside of Christian learning, saying that otherwise they would wound us with our own weapons, and with our own arts and sciences overcome us. Indeed, out of this crafty decree the Christians were put so well in their place, and found themselves at such danger of declining into ignorance, that Apollinaris of Alexandria and his son were compelled to coin the liberal arts out of the Bible, taking that little literature they were allowed and drawing out of it diverse forms of speech, of poetry, of dialogue – even a new Christian grammar. Yet, as Socrates says, the providence of God provided better than the industry of the two Apollinarii, by taking away that illiterate law along with the life of the one who devised it. It was considered a great injury to be deprived of Hellenic learning, and thought of as more profound a persecution, and causing more decaying and undermining of the Church, than even the cruelty of the severely and clearly anti-Christian emperors, Decius and Diocletian.

And perhaps it was the same political bent that drove the Devil, in a dream during Lent, to whip St. Jerome for reading Cicero. And if not the Devil, then a phantasm summoned by the fever possessing him. For if the discipliner truly had been an angel, as St. Jerome recalled, who punished the man for heretical reading, and not simply for too much vain dwelling on Ciceronianisms, then the judge had been quite plainly a little biased. Firstly, for chastising Jerome for serious Cicero and not for the comedies of Plautus, which he confesses to have been reading not long before. Secondly to

apparition; insomuch that Basil teaches how some good use may be made of Margites, a sportful poem, not now extant, writ by Homer; and why not then of Morgante, an Italian romance much to the same purpose?

But if it be agreed we shall be tried by visions, there is a vision recorded by Eusebius, far ancients than this tale of Jerome, to the nun Eustochium, and, besides, has nothing of a fever in it. Dionysius Alexandrinus was about the year 240 a person of great name in the Church for piety and learning, who had wont to avail himself much against heretics by being conversant in their books; until a certain presbyter laid it scrupulously to his conscience, how he durst venture himself among those defiling volumes. The worthy man, loath to give offence, fell into a new debate with himself what was to be thought; when suddenly a vision sent from God (it is his own epistle that so avers it) confirmed him in these words: "Read any books whatever come to thy hands, for thou art sufficient both to judge aright and to examine each matter." To this revelation he assented the sooner, as he confesses, because it was answerable to that of the Apostle to the Thessalonians, "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." And he might have added another remarkable saying of the same author: "To the pure, all things are pure"; not only meats and drinks, but all kind of knowledge whether of good or

chastise only him, and to let him so many other ancient fathers grow old in all kinds of pleasant and exciting studies without ever facing the lash of such a tutoring apparition. What of Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea, who encouraged the reading of Homer's lost mock-heroic poem, Margites, for the good that could be gleaned from it? Why not then read the Italian romance, Morgante, for the same purpose?

But if it is agreed we shall be tried by visions, then there is another, far more ancient, we may look at: a vision recorded by Eusebius. Besides, this one has no fever involved in it. About the year 240, Dionysius of Alexandria was a great name of piety and learning within the Church, and was in the habit of taking on heretics by being familiar with their books. That is until a certain elder made doubtful his conscience, pointing to how he ventures among such corrupting volumes. Dionysius, a worthy man not wanting to give offence, then fell into a debate with himself over what was to be thought of reading the works of heretics, when suddenly, so his own letter declares, a vision sent from God confirmed for him in these words: "Read any books whatever come to thy hands, for thou art sufficient both to judge aright and to examine each matter." He confesses that he accepted quick this revelation, as it matched Paul's message to the Thessalonians: "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." Dionysius might have also justified his choice by another remarkable saying of that same Apostle: "To the pure, all things are pure" – not only food

## Areopagitica

evil; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled.

For books are as meats and viands are; some of good, some of evil substance; and yet God, in that unapocryphal vision, said without exception, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat", leaving the choice to each man's discretion. Wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome; and best books to a naughty mind are not unapplicable to occasions of evil. Bad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction; but herein the difference is of bad books, that they to a discreet and judicious reader serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate. Whereof what better witness can ye expect I should produce, than one of your own now sitting in Parliament, the chief of learned men reputed in this land, Mr Selden; whose volume of natural and national laws proves, not only by great authorities brought together, but by exquisite reasons and theorems almost mathematically demonstrative, that all opinions, yea errors, known, read, and collated, are of main service and assistance toward the speedy attainment of what is truest. I conceive, therefore, that when God did enlarge the universal diet of man's body, saving ever the rules of temperance, he then also, as before, left arbitrary the dieting and repasting of our minds; as wherein every mature man might have to exercise his own leading capacity.

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

and drink, but all kinds of knowledge, whether it be of good or evil. The knowledge cannot defile, and nor so can the books, if the will and the conscience remain undefiled.

For books are as meats and other food, with some of good and some of evil substance, and yet God said to Peter, in that authentic vision related in Acts, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." Without exception, and leaving the choice to the discretion of each. Wholesome food to a spoiled stomach differs little or not at all from unwholesome; yet the best books to a wicked mind are not useless in occasions of evil. Even within the healthiest concoction, bad meat will scarce breed good nourishment – and here is the difference between bad food and bad books. Bad books, to a thoughtful and discerning reader, serve as opportunities of discovery and illustration, and provide forewarning and understanding. What better witness of this can you expect me to produce than one of your own, now sitting in Parliament, the most highly regarded of the knowledgeable in this land: Mr John Selden. His work of natural and national law lays out, not only by bringing together and referring to great authorities, but by carefully drawn out reasons and propositions almost mathematical in their clarity, how all opinions, and yes errors, that are known, read, and collected are crucial in the push toward the speedy attainment of that which is most true. I put forward, then, that when God enlarged the universal diet of our body, saving the rule of moderation, he then left, as before, the diet and feeding of our minds down to our personal choice

How great a virtue is temperance, how much of a moment through the whole life of man! Yet God commits the managing so great a trust, without particular law or prescription, wholly to the demeanour of every grown man. And therefore when he himself tabled the Jews from heaven, that omer, which was every man's daily portion of manna, is computed to have been more than might have well sufficed the heartiest feeder thrice as many meals. For those actions which enter into a man, rather than issue out of him, and therefore defile not, God uses not to captivate under a perpetual childhood of prescription, but trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser; there were but little work left for preaching, if law and compulsion should grow so fast upon those things which heretofore were governed only by exhortation. Solomon informs us, that much reading is a weariness to the flesh; but neither he nor other inspired author tells us that such reading is unlawful: yet certainly had God thought good to limit us herein, it had been much more expedient to have told us what was unlawful than what was wearisome. As for the burning of those Ephesian books by St. Paul's converts; 'tis replied the books were magic, the Syriac so renders them. It was a private act, a voluntary act, and leaves us to a voluntary imitation: the men in remorse burnt those books which were their own; the magistrate by this example is not appointed; these men practised the books, another might perhaps have read them in some sort usefully.

and judgement. Thus, that everyone mature might have to exercise their ability to lead themselves.

How great a virtue is moderation, and how crucial throughout the whole of one's life! Yet God hands over the managing of so great a trust, without rule and regulation, wholly to the disposition of every adult. And so, when He himself fed the Jews from heaven, that portion given, which was each one's daily measure of manna, is calculated to have been more than might have satisfied the heartiest feeder for three times as many meals. As Christ said, those things that enter into a person, unlike those things that issue out, do not defile, corrupt, and disgrace. For those incoming things, God entrusts each with the gift of reason to be therefore their own chooser, rather than trapping all within a perpetual childhood of bans and permissions. There would be little work left for preaching, if law and force grew fast over and upon those things that had previously been tackled only by warnings and advice. Solomon might tell us that much reading is a weariness to the flesh, but neither he nor any other divinely-inspired author tells us that this or that reading is unlawful. If God had thought it good to limit us in reading, it would have been a little more effective to have told us what was illegal rather than what was tiring. As for the burning of Ephesian books by converts of St. Paul: the books were thought to be magic, rendered so by their language. This book burning was a private act, a voluntary act, and leaves us to imitate or not voluntarily. The converts, in remorse, burnt books which were their own – yet

Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed upon Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not intermixed. It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian.

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much

the judge and the magistrate are not elected to book-banning and -burning by this example. The converts previously practised the magic found in those books; another might perhaps have read them and put the knowledge to some good use.

Good and evil, we know, in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably. We know that the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and so often so skilfully resemblant of one the other that they can hardly be told apart – the mix of many seeds given to Psyche by Venus as a punishing and endless task of sorting were not more mixed than the seeds of good and evil. It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. Perhaps this is that doom into which Adam fell: that is, of knowing good through evil. That is the state humankind is in now, and what wisdom is there in choosing, what self-control would there be to uphold and endure, without knowledge of evil? The one that can face up to and consider vice with all its baits and apparent pleasures, and yet hold back, and yet recognise, and yet freely choose that which is truly better – that is the true battling Christian.

I cannot praise a virtue that hides and shields itself, staying unexercised and unspoken, that never rides out to meet an adversary but sneaks out of the race, the race where that immortal winning wreath is to be won, unwinnable without the dust and heat of effort. We do not bring innocence into the

rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness. Which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, and yet abstain. Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with less danger, scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.

But of the harm that may result hence three kinds are usually reckoned. First, is feared the infection that may spread; but then all human learning and controversy in religious points must remove out of the world, yea the Bible itself; for that oftentimes relates blasphemy not nicely, it describes the carnal sense of wicked men not unelegantly, it brings in holiest men passionately murmuring against Providence through all the arguments of Epicurus: in other great disputes

world, we bring impurity; that which makes us pure is trial, and trial is by facing that which is contrary. And so that virtue which is but a child and inexperienced when it comes to the contemplation of evil, and does not first know all the things that vice promises to its own followers and only then rejects those promises, is an empty virtue, not a pure one. Its whiteness is merely superficial. That is exactly why our own sage and serious poet Edmund Spenser (I dare say a better teacher, in my opinion, than either Scotus or Aquinas), when trying to show true moderation through the character of Guyon, takes his pilgrim through the tempting cave of Mammon, a bower of earthly bliss, so that he may be exposed to all, understand, and still hold back. The knowledge and understanding of vice is in this world so necessary for the building and strengthening of human virtue, just as looking at error is vital for the confirmation of truth. Is there any safer way, with less risk, to explore the regions of evil and falsehood than by reading all manner of writings and hearing all manner of argument? This is the benefit gained from the promiscuous reading of books.

The harm that may come from that promiscuous reading is usually reckoned to be of three kinds. First, that the infection of bad ideas may spread. But then all human learning, including disputes on religious points, must be removed from the world. Even the Bible itself, for that often relates blasphemy in great detail, describes the lust of wicked men elaborately, shows the holiest men passionately murmuring atheistically against God,

it answers dubiously and darkly to the common reader. And ask a Talmudist what ails the modesty of his marginal Keri, that Moses and all the prophets cannot persuade him to pronounce the textual Chetiv. For these causes we all know the Bible itself put by the Papist into the first rank of prohibited books. The ancientist Fathers must be next removed, as Clement of Alexandria, and that Eusebian book of Evangelic preparation, transmitting our ears through a hoard of heathenish obscenities to receive the Gospel. Who finds not that Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Jerome, and others discover more heresies than they well confute, and that oft for heresy which is the truer opinion?

Nor boots it to say for these, and all the heathen writers of greatest infection, if it must be thought so, with whom is bound up the life of human learning, that they writ in an unknown tongue, so long as we are sure those languages are known as well to the worst of men, who are both most able and most diligent to instil the poison they suck, first into the courts of princes, acquainting them with the choicest delights and criticisms of sin. As perhaps did that Petronius whom Nero called his arbiter, the master of his revels; and the notorious ribald of Arezzo, dreaded and yet dear to the Italian courtiers. I name not him for posterity's sake, whom Henry VIII named in

presents other disputes in a way that is unclear and misleading to the common reader. Ask those who read the Talmud and write euphemisms as substitutes in the margins of the Old Testament and say these aloud: what is the content that is so embarrassing that even Moses and all the prophets cannot persuade them to repeat the actual text? For all these reasons that we all know well the Bible would be placed by the Catholics into the first rank of prohibited books. Next for removal would be the most ancient fathers of the Church: Clement of Alexandria, and the book by Eusebius on Evangelic preparation, both transmit to our ears the message that we should receive the Gospel, but only through a hoard of heathenish obscenities, described in detail to make a person shun those pagan rituals. The likes of Irenaeus, Epiphanius, and Jerome discover and present more heresies than they are able to prove wrong, often refuting apparent heresy that is closer to the truth.

It is no use to say that these, and all the most infectious heathen writers (if it must be thought of as an infection), with whom is bound up the life of human learning, are writing in an unknown tongue, and so do not need prohibiting and licensing as English does. Not as long as we know that those unknown languages are actually known to the worst of us, those who are both most able and most eager to administer the poison they draw out from elsewhere. Those who would instil that poison into the courts of princes first, to acquaint the influential with temptations and criticisms of the idea of sin. As perhaps did the man Petronius,

## Areopagitica

merriment his vicar of hell. By which compendious way all the contagion that foreign books can infuse will find a passage to the people far easier and shorter than an Indian voyage, though it could be sailed either by the north of Cataio eastward, or of Canada westward, while our Spanish licensing gags the English press never so severely.

But on the other side that infection which is from books of controversy in religion is more doubtful and dangerous to the learned than to the ignorant; and yet those books must be permitted untouched by the licenser. It will be hard to instance where any ignorant man hath been ever seduced by papistical book in English, unless it were commended and expounded to him by some of that clergy: and indeed all such tractates, whether false or true, are as the prophecy of Isaiah was to the eunuch, not to be understood without a guide. But of our priests and doctors how many have been corrupted by studying the comments of Jesuits and Sorbonists, and how fast they could transfuse that corruption into the people, our experience is both late and sad. It is not forgot, since the acute and distinct Arminius was perverted merely by the perusing of a nameless discourse written at Delft, which at first he took in hand to confute.

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

whom the emperor Nero called his chief judge of taste and etiquette, and that notorious and profane satirist of Arezzo, whose wit and writing terrified the Italian courtiers into keeping him close. Out of decency I do not name another: he whom Henry VIII joyfully declared as his Vicar of Hell. Via this quick and efficient way, all the contagion that foreign books have to spread will find a passage to the people far easier and more directly than any Indian voyage could, whether it sailed eastward by the north of China or westward toward Canada, all whilst our Spanish licensing gags the English press worse than ever.

Meanwhile, the infection that threatens from controversial books in religion brings more doubt and danger to the learned than to the ignorant – and yet those books must be allowed untouched by any licenser. It will be hard to show where any common person has been seduced by Papal writing in English, unless it were recommended and recounted to them by some of the clergy. And, indeed, all such religious writings, whether false or true, are as the prophecy of Isaiah was to the eunuch: not to be understood without a guide. But of our guides, our priests and doctors, see how many have been corrupted through studying the comments of the Catholic Jesuits and scholars of Sorbonne, in Paris, and how quickly they could transfuse that corruption into the people – we have such recent and sad experience with this. It is not forgot how that perceptive and clear-thinking theologian we call Arminius was turned simply through perusing a discourse written at Delft,

which he had first picked up in order to prove it wrong.

Seeing, therefore, that those books, and those in great abundance, which are likeliest to taint both life and doctrine, cannot be suppressed without the fall of learning and of all ability in disputation, and that these books of either sort are most and soonest catching to the learned, from whom to the common people whatever is heretical or dissolute may quickly be conveyed, and that evil manners are as perfectly learnt without books a thousand other ways which cannot be stopped, and evil doctrine not with books can propagate, except a teacher guide, which he might also do without writing, and so beyond prohibiting, I am not able to unfold, how this cautelous enterprise of licensing can be exempted from the number of vain and impossible attempts. And he who were pleasantly disposed could not well avoid to liken it to the exploit of that gallant man who thought to pound up the crows by shutting his park gate.

Besides another inconvenience, if learned men be the first receivers out of books and dispreaders both of vice and error, how shall the licensers themselves be confided in, unless we can confer upon them, or they assume to themselves above all others in the land, the grace of infallibility and uncorruptedness? And again, if it be true that a wise man, like a good refiner, can gather gold out of the drossiest volume, and that a

Therefore, we can see that those books – which there are many of – that are the most likely to corrupt both their subject and their readers, cannot be covered up without preventing learning and weakening our ability to dispute and counter-argue to vanishing point. We can see that these, or any, books find their first and biggest audience in the educated, who may then quickly and easily spread whatever is corrupt and heretical to the common people. We can see that evil manners may be learned just as perfectly a thousand other ways that cannot be stopped, and that evil doctrine can only be spread through books with the help of a teacher and guide – and that this teacher and guide can do so without writing, and is thus beyond your censorship. I cannot see this cunning mission of licensing as anything other than merely one more inevitably fruitless attempt at the impossible. Even the gentlest critic would have a hard time avoiding making the comparison between this and the plucky man who hatches a plan to trap the crows by closing the park gate.

Yet here's another inconvenience, if the learned are the first to get something out of books and thus the ones to spread both evil and error: how can we confide in the licensers themselves, unless we place upon them, or they place it upon themselves and no others in all the land, the grace of infallibility and purity? And again, if it is true that someone wise, like any good refiner, can get gold

fool will be a fool with the best book, yea or without book; there is no reason that we should deprive a wise man of any advantage to his wisdom, while we seek to restrain from a fool, that which being restrained will be no hindrance to his folly. For if there should be so much exactness always used to keep that from him which is unfit for his reading, we should in the judgement of Aristotle not only, but of Solomon and of our Saviour, not vouchsafe him good precepts, and by consequence not willingly admit him to good books; as being certain that a wise man will make better use of an idle pamphlet, than a fool will do of sacred Scripture.

'Tis next alleged we must not expose ourselves to temptations without necessity, and next to that, not employ our time in vain things. To both these objections one answer will serve, out of the grounds already laid, that to all men such books are not temptations, nor vanities, but useful drugs and materials wherewith to temper and compose effective and strong medicines, which man's life cannot want. The rest, as children and childish men, who have not the art to qualify and prepare these working minerals, well may be exhorted to forbear, but hindered forcibly they cannot be by all the licensing that Sainted Inquisition could ever yet contrive. Which is what I promised to deliver next: that this order of licensing conduces nothing to the end for which it was framed; and hath almost prevented me by being clear already while thus much hath been explaining. See the ingenuity of Truth, who, when she gets a free and

out of the most impure volume, and that a fool will be a fool with both the best book and with no book at all, then there is no reason that we should deprive the wise of any advantage to their wisdom just because we seek to deprive a fool of something that the fool does not need for to be foolish. If we are to be so exact and strict when keeping from someone that which is supposedly unfit for their reading, then, in the judgement of Aristotle, and of Solomon and our Saviour too, we ought not give them good writings nor allow them access to good books. After all, the wise will make better use of a pointless pamphlet, than a fool will do with sacred Scripture.

After this it is argued that we must not needlessly expose ourselves to temptation; and after this, that we must not spend our time on worthless things. To both of these objections one answer will suffice, built from the grounds I have already laid, and that answer is this: such books are not temptations, or worthless, to everyone, but can be useful goods and materials to mix and create strong, effective medicines that one cannot do without in life. As for the rest, the children and the childish, who lack the skill to identify and prepare these raw minerals, they may well be advised to avoid, but to prevent them forcibly simply cannot be done, even through all the licensing that the Sainted Inquisition could ever dream up. Which is what I promised to deliver next: the argument that this order of licensing brings about nothing that it was intended for – an argument that has almost anticipated me and come out already in my

## Areopagitica

willing hand, opens herself faster than the pace of method and discourse can overtake her.

It was the task which I began with, to show that no nation, or well-instituted state, if they valued books at all, did ever use this way of licensing; and it might be answered, that this is a piece of prudence lately discovered. To which I return, that as it was a thing slight and obvious to think on, so it had been difficult to find out, there wanted not among them long since who suggested such a course; which they not following, leave us a pattern of their judgement that it was not the rest knowing, but the not approving, which was the cause of their not using it.

Plato, a man of high authority, indeed, but least of all for his Commonwealth, in the book of his Laws, which no city ever yet received, fed his fancy by making edicts to his airy burgomasters, which they who otherwise admire him wish had been rather buried and excused in the genial cups of an Academic night sitting. By which laws he seems to tolerate no kind of learning but by unalterable decree, consisting most of practical traditions, to the attainment whereof a library of smaller bulk than his own Dialogues would be abundant. And there also enacts, that no poet should so much as read to any private man what he had written, until the judges and law-keepers had seen it, and allowed it. But that Plato meant this law peculiarly to that commonwealth which he had

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

explaining of everything else. See the ingenuity of Truth, which, when it gets a free and willing hand, opens itself faster than the speed of any speech or writing that hopes to overtake and introduce it.

T'was the task I began with, to show that no nation or well-run state, if they valued books at all, did ever use this way of licensing. One might answer that this licensing is a piece of prudence only recently discovered. To which I answer, that as it is an idea quite easy and obvious to think up, and so quite difficult to find absent in history, there was never any lack of those who suggested such a course to follow. That they did not follow it leaves us with a pattern of judgement which shows that it was not the lack of knowledge of the method, but the lack of approval, that was the reason that it was not used.

Plato is and was a man of high authority, but not because of his Republic and his Laws, which no city ever yet has taken up. In these he indulged himself by making edicts to his imaginary mayors – edicts which those who admire Plato wish had been buried and excused pleasantly in a single night of debate. The laws from both of these dialogues seem to indicate that he tolerates no kind of learning apart from when mandated by law, mostly made up of practical traditions, for which a library that in total was smaller than his own dialogues would be more than enough to achieve. And there he also plays out the idea that no poet should even read to any private citizen the poetry that they had written, until the judges and the law-keepers had

imagined, and to no other, is evident. Why was he not else a lawgiver to himself, but a transgressor, and to be expelled by his own magistrates; both for the wanton epigrams and dialogues which he made, and his perpetual reading of Sophron Mimus and Aristophanes, books of grossest infamy, and also for commending the latter of them, though he were the malicious libeller of his chief friends, to be read by the tyrant Dionysius, who had little need of such trash to spend his time on? But that he knew this licensing of poems had reference and dependence to many other provisos there set down in his fancied republic, which in this world could have no place: and so neither he himself, nor any magistrate or city, ever imitated that course, which, taken apart from those other collateral injunctions, must needs be vain and fruitless. For if they fell upon one kind of strictness, unless their care were equal to regulate all other things of like aptness to corrupt the mind, that single endeavour they knew would be but a fond labour; to shut and fortify one gate against corruption, and be necessitated to leave others round about wide open.

If we think to regulate printing, thereby to rectify manners, we must regulate all recreation and pastimes, all that is delightful to man. No music must be heard, no song be set or sung, but what is grave and Doric. There must be licensing dancers, that no gesture, motion, or deportment be taught our youth

seen it, and allowed it. But that Plato meant this law only for that republic which he imagined is clear. If not, then why, instead of being a lawgiver to himself, was he a transgressor, expelled by his own government for the explicit and homophilic poems and dialogues he produced, for his perpetual reading of Sophron Mimus and Aristophanes, the most infamous of books, and for recommending Aristophanes, even though he ridiculed Plato's friend Socrates, to the tyrant Dionysius, who had little need of such trash to spend his time on? He knew, even as he imagined his Republic, that this licensing of poems referred to and depended on the context he had laid out, a context that could not be replicated in this world: and so neither he himself, nor any civil servant or city, ever kickstarted that course – a course that, if undertaken alone and without doing anything about other potential sources of corruption, must be futile and fruitless. For if one kind of strictness were passionately adopted, all knew that then, unless they put the same and equal care into regulating all else that could potentially pollute the mind, it would be a foolish endeavour: essentially, to close and fortify one gate against corruption, and be forced to leave the rest round about wide open.

If we decide to regulate printing, in order to correct manners, then we must regulate all recreation and pastimes, all that is delightful to us. No music may be heard, no song be set or sung, except that which is serious, martial, and manly. Dancers must be licensed, so that no gesture,

## Areopagitica

but what by their allowance shall be thought honest; for such Plato was provided of. It will ask more than the work of twenty licensers to examine all the lutes, the violins, and the guitars in every house; they must not be suffered to prattle as they do, but must be licensed what they may say. And who shall silence all the airs and madrigals that whisper softness in chambers? The windows also, and the balconies must be thought on; there are shrewd books, with dangerous frontispieces, set to sale; who shall prohibit them, shall twenty licensers? The villages also must have their visitors to inquire what lectures the bagpipe and the rebeck reads, even to the ballatry and the gamut of every municipal fiddler, for these are the countryman's Arcadias, and his Monte Mayors.

Next, what more national corruption, for which England hears ill abroad, than household gluttony: who shall be the rectors of our daily rioting? And what shall be done to inhibit the multitudes that frequent those houses where drunkenness is sold and harboured? Our garments also should be referred to the licensing of some more sober workmasters to see them cut into a less wanton garb. Who shall regulate all the mixed conversation of our youth, male and female together, as is the fashion of this country? Who shall still appoint what shall be discoursed, what presumed, and no further? Lastly, who shall forbid and separate all idle resort, all evil company? These things will be, and must be; but how they shall be

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

motion, or posture can be taught our youth except those deemed, through the licensers allowance, honest – Plato has laid out how. It will be beyond the work of twenty licensers to examine all the lutes, the violins, and the guitars in every house – yet they cannot be allowed to chatter on as they please, but must be licensed regarding what they may say. And who shall silence all the songs that whisper softness in private rooms? The windows too, and the balconies, must be considered: there wicked books, with dangerous imagery, are set to sale. Who shall prohibit all these? A mere twenty licensers? And the villages also will need their own visitors who can inquire what lectures the bagpipe and the three-stringed rebeck reads, even inspecting the whole catalogue of ballads and the entire range of notes of every town fiddler, for these are the countryperson's romances and epics, their Arcadias and Monte Mayors.

Next, there is no bigger national corruption, one which England is embarrassed by abroad, than household bingeing: who shall be the governors of our daily rioting? And what shall be done to hold back the multitudes that haunt those houses frequently where drunkenness is sold and safeguarded? Our clothing too should be passed through the licensing of some more sensible workmasters to see them cut into a less playful outfit. Who shall monitor all the mixed conversation of our youth, with male and female altogether, as is the way of this country? Who shall decide the limits of what shall be argued between them, of what liberties lie open and how far they

## Areopagitica

least hurtful, how least enticing, herein consists the grave and governing wisdom of a state.

To sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian polities, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition; but to ordain wisely as in this world of evil, in the midst whereof God hath placed us unavoidably. Nor is it Plato's licensing of books will do this, which necessarily pulls along with it so many other kinds of licensing, as will make us all both ridiculous and weary, and yet frustrate; but those unwritten, or at least unconstraining, laws of virtuous education, religious and civil nurture, which Plato there mentions as the bonds and ligaments of the commonwealth, the pillars and the sustainers of every written statute; these they be which will bear chief sway in such matters as these, when all licensing will be easily eluded. Impunity and remissness, for certain, are the bane of a commonwealth; but here the great art lies, to discern in what the law is to bid restraint and punishment, and in what things persuasion only is to work.

If every action, which is good or evil in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance and prescription and

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

may be taken? Lastly, who shall ban and break up all pointless pursuit, all evil company? These things will be, and must be – they are all inevitable. It is not in banning but in considering how might they be less harmful, less tempting, that is the place for the serious and governing wisdom of the state.

To escape from the real world into the political systems of imaginary societies, to Atlantis and Utopia, which can never be drawn on and used, will not mend our condition – what will is to put things in order wisely in this world of evil, in the midst of which God has inescapably placed us. Nor will Plato's licensing of books achieve that mending, as it pulls inevitably along with it so many other kinds of licensing that will make us laughable, tired, and frustrated. But it is those unwritten, or at least not restricting, laws of education in virtue and in becoming virtuous, and in religious and civil nurture, which Plato describes in his Laws as the bonds and ligaments of the commonwealth, the pillars and preservers of every written law. It is those that will make the difference in these matters, when all licensing will be easily outfoxed. Unpunished crime and neglectful law, for sure, are the ruin of a commonwealth, but here is where the great art lies: to tease out and to discover and to separate what can be restrained by the law and legally punished, and what can only be worked on by persuasion.

If every action, which may be considered good or evil in an adult, were performed under permission

compulsion, what were virtue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what gratitude to be sober, just, or continent? Many there be that complain of divine Providence for suffering Adam to transgress; foolish tongues! When God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had been else a mere artificial Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions. We ourselves esteem not of that obedience, or love, or gift, which is of force: God therefore left him free, set before him a provoking object, ever almost in his eyes; herein consisted his merit, herein the right of his reward, the praise of his abstinence. Wherefore did he create passions within us, pleasures round about us, but that these rightly tempered are the very ingredients of virtue?

They are not skilful considerers of human things, who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin; for, besides that it is a huge heap increasing under the very act of diminishing, though some part of it may for a time be withdrawn from some persons, it cannot be removed from all, in such a universal thing as books are; and when this is done, yet the sin remains entire. Though ye take from a covetous man all his treasure, he has yet one jewel left, ye cannot bereave him of his covetousness. Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste, that came not hither so; such great care and

and instruction and force, then what would virtue be but a name, what praise could then be earned by doing good, what gratitude and surprise at someone being sober, honourable, or self-controlled? Many there are who complain how the divine allowed Adam the potential to disobey: foolish words! When God gave him reason he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is choosing – no more, no less. Otherwise he would have been a mere artificial Adam, as he would be in any puppet show. We ourselves do not respect obedience, or love, or giving, that is produced by force. And so God left Adam free, setting before him a provoking object of temptation, almost always in his sight, and it is here where his merit lies, here the justification for any reward, for the praise of his restraint. Why did he create passions within us and pleasures all around, if not because to have these passions tamed through self-control is to have the very ingredients of virtue?

They are not so skilled at studying human behaviour, those who think to remove sin by removing the cause of it. For – besides the fact that it is a huge heap that increases as you try to diminish it – while some part of it may be removed for some time from some people, it cannot be removed from all, as such a universal thing are books. Even when the removal of all is achieved, yet the sin remains in full. Though you take from the greedy all treasure they possess, yet they have one jewel left: you cannot bereave them of their greed. Banish all sexual temptations, shut up all youth into the most severe discipline of any monk

## Areopagitica

wisdom is required to the right managing of this point. Suppose we could expel sin by this means; look how much we thus expel of sin, so much we expel of virtue: for the matter of them both is the same; remove that, and ye remove them both alike.

This justifies the high providence of God, who, though he command us temperance, justice, continence, yet pours out before us, even to a profuseness, all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit and satiety. Why should we then affect a rigour contrary to the manner of God and of nature, by abridging or scanting those means, which books freely permitted are, both to the trial of virtue and the exercise of truth? It would be better done, to learn that the law must needs be frivolous, which goes to restrain things, uncertainly and yet equally working to good and to evil. And were I the chooser, a dream of well-doing should be preferred before many times as much the forcible hindrance of evil-doing. For God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person more than the restraint of ten vicious.

And albeit whatever thing we hear or see, sitting, walking, travelling, or conversing, may be fitly called our book, and is of the same effect that writings are, yet grant the thing to be prohibited were only books,

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

or nun, and you will not make innocent those that did not come there so. Such great care and wisdom is required to manage this point well, and correctly. Suppose that we could drive out sin this way, then watch when, however much of sin we remove, we remove that much of virtue, for the cause of both is the same. Remove that, and you remove them both alike.

This justifies the high providence of God: that though he commands of us moderation and restraint, fairness, and self-control, he pours out before us, even to extravagance, all desirable things and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limits and satisfaction. Why should we then lay down a strictness that goes against the way of God and nature, by cutting down or cutting off those necessary instruments for both the testing of virtue and the exercise of truth, which freely permitted books are? It would be far better for all to learn that licensing and censorship laws must inevitably be worthless, variably and yet equally working to good and to evil ends. And were I the chooser, then hoping for the doing of good should be many times more desirable than preventing, by force, the doing of evil. For God, for certain, respects the development and completion of one virtuous person more than the holding back of ten vicious.

Though anything that we might hear or see whilst sitting, walking, travelling, or talking, may be aptly considered our 'book' in that case, and works to the same end as writings do, let us assume the

it appears that this Order hitherto is far insufficient to the end which it intends. Do we not see, not once or oftener, but weekly, that continued court-libel against the Parliament and City, printed, as the wet sheets can witness, and dispersed among us, for all that licensing can do? Yet this is the prime service a man would think, wherein this Order should give proof of itself. If it were executed, you'll say. But certain, if execution be remiss or blindfold now, and in this particular, what will it be hereafter and in other books? If then the Order shall not be vain and frustrate, behold a new labour, Lords and Commons, ye must repeal and proscribe all scandalous and unlicensed books already printed and divulged; after ye have drawn them up into a list, that all may know which are condemned, and which not; and ordain that no foreign books be delivered out of custody, till they have been read over. This office will require the whole time of not a few overseers, and those no vulgar men. There be also books which are partly useful and excellent, partly culpable and pernicious; this work will ask as many more officials, to make expurgations and expunctions, that the commonwealth of learning be not damnified. In fine, when the multitude of books increase upon their hands, ye must be fain to catalogue all those printers who are found frequently offending, and forbid the importation of their whole suspected typography. In a word, that this your Order may be exact and not deficient, ye must reform it perfectly according to the model of Trent and Seville, which I know ye abhor to do.

thing to be banned is only books: then it seems this Order thus far is quite incapable of reaching its intended goal. Do we not see, not only once, nor every and now then, but weekly, the printing of the Court Mercury, continued slander of Parliament and City that the wet sheets can witness, even in the face of licensing? Yet this newspaper is the perfect situation, one would think, in which this Order should prove itself. If it were actually put into practice, you will say. But surely, if the implementation is inattentive or blindfolded now, what is it likely to be in the future and with other books? If the Order is to be successful hereafter, no longer thwarted and in vain, behold a new task, Lords and Commons: you must recall and outlaw all scandalous and unlicensed books already printed and published, after compiling them all into a list, so that all may know which are condemned, and which permitted. And you must command all foreign books be kept in custody, unfreed until they have been read over. This task will require the full time and attention of not just a few overseers – and those overseers need be no ordinary people. There are also books that are partly useful and excellent, partly guilty and harmful – thus this work requires many more again to clean up and make deletions, ensuring that the common good of learning is not injured. And ultimately, when the multitude of books increase upon their hands, you must be ready to instead catalogue all printers who are found frequently offending, and simply ban their entire suspected collection. In short, if your Order is to be precise and not failing in any way, you must reform

Yet though ye should condescend to this, which God forbid, the Order still would be but fruitless and defective to that end whereto ye meant it. If to prevent sects and schisms, who is so unread or so uncatechized in story, that hath not heard of many sects refusing books as a hindrance, and preserving their doctrine unmixed for many ages, only by unwritten traditions? The Christian faith, for that was once a schism, is not unknown to have spread all over Asia, ere any Gospel or Epistle was seen in writing. If the amendment of manners be aimed at, look into Italy and Spain, whether those places be one scruple the better, the honester, the wiser, the chaster, since all the inquisitional rigour that hath been executed upon books.

Another reason, whereby to make it plain that this Order will miss the end it seeks, consider by the quality which ought to be in every licenser. It cannot be denied but that he who is made judge to sit upon the birth or death of books, whether they may be wafted into this world or not, had need to be a man above the common measure, both studious, learned, and judicious; there may be else no mean mistakes in the censure of what is passable or not; which is also

it to match perfectly the model of Trent, that Catholic council, and Seville, that hive of Inquisitors – a prospect which I know you recoil in disgust from.

But if you were to give way to this – God forbid – then the Order still would be only fruitless and inadequate to the goal you intended it to achieve. If the licensing is to prevent division and breakaway movements, who is so lacking oral or written tutoring in history that they have never heard of many groups refusing books and writing as a hindrance, and instead preserving their teaching intact for many ages only by unwritten traditions? The Christian faith, which once was a breakaway movement, is known to have spread all over Asia before any Gospel or Epistle was seen in written form. If it is the improvement and correction of manners that is to be aimed at, then look to Italy and Spain, and judge whether those places be now even one ounce the better, the more honest, the wiser, or the more innocent, after all the inquisitional severity that has there been brought upon books.

For another reason with which to make it clear that this Order will miss the end it seeks, consider the quality which ought to be found in every licenser. It cannot be denied that the one who is made judge to preside over the birth and death of books, on whether or not they may be escorted into this world, would need be of more than average quality, being studious, educated, and wise. There can be no small mistakes or minor consequences in

no mean injury. If he be of such worth as behoves him, there cannot be a more tedious and unpleasing journey-work, a greater loss of time levied upon his head, than to be made the perpetual reader of unchosen books and pamphlets, oftentimes huge volumes. There is no book that is acceptable unless at certain seasons; but to be enjoined the reading of that at all times, and in a hand scarce legible, whereof three pages would not down at any time in the fairest print, is an imposition which I cannot believe how he that values time and his own studies, or is but of a sensible nostril, should be able to endure. In this one thing I crave leave of the present licensers to be pardoned for so thinking; who doubtless took this office up, looking on it through their obedience to the Parliament, whose command perhaps made all things seem easy and unlaborious to them; but that this short trial hath wearied them out already, their own expressions and excuses to them who make so many journeys to solicit their license are testimony enough. Seeing therefore those who now possess the employment by all evident signs wish themselves well rid of it; and that no man of worth, none that is not a plain unthrift of his own hours, is ever likely to succeed them, except he mean to put himself to the salary of a press corrector; we may easily foresee what kind of licensers we are to expect hereafter, either ignorant, imperious, and remiss, or basely pecuniary. This is what I had to show, wherein this Order cannot conduce to that end whereof it bears the intention.

the censoring of what is acceptable or not. If one is found of such worth as is necessary, there cannot be a more mind-numbing and unwelcome menial task, no more greater waste of time put upon them, than to be made the endless reader of books and pamphlets one never asked for – often huge volumes. There is no book that is desirable at any and every moment, so to be tasked with the reading of all at all times, and in a hardly readable hand, is an inflicted burden that I cannot imagine any who value their time and personal study, or who simply have good taste, will be able to endure. This next thing I hope I have the permission of the present licensers to be forgiven for thinking: that even though they undoubtedly took on this responsibility due to regarding it as part of their obedience to Parliament, whose commands perhaps make all things seem easy and effortless to them, this short trial-shift thus far has tired them out already. Their own expressions and excuses upon seeing those who make so many journeys to ask for their license are evidence enough of that. So, seeing that those who currently possess the employment wish themselves, by all evident signs, well rid of it, and given that no-one of worth, none who aren't just wasters of their own hours, is ever likely to take their place (unless they particularly desire the salary of a press corrector), we can easily predict what kind of licensers we should expect to end up with: ignorant, authoritarian, incompetent, or just plain greedy. This is all I had to say regarding how this Order cannot produce the results that it speaks of intending.

I lastly proceed from the no good it can do, to the manifest hurt it causes, in being first the greatest discouragement and affront that can be offered to learning, and to learned men.

It was the complaint and lamentation of prelates, upon every least breath of a motion to remove pluralities, and distribute more equally Church revenues, that then all learning would be for ever dashed and discouraged. But as for that opinion, I never found cause to think that the tenth part of learning stood or fell with the clergy: nor could I ever but hold it for a sordid and unworthy speech of any churchman who had a competency left him. If therefore ye be loath to dishearten utterly and discontent, not the mercenary crew of false pretenders to learning, but the free and ingenuous sort of such as evidently were born to study, and love learning for itself, not for lucre or any other end but the service of God and of truth, and perhaps that lasting fame and perpetuity of praise which God and good men have consented shall be the reward of those whose published labours advance the good of mankind; then know that, so far to distrust the judgement and the honesty of one who hath but a common repute in learning, and never yet offended, as not to count him fit to print his mind without a tutor and examiner, lest he should drop a schism, or something of corruption, is the greatest displeasure and indignity to a free and knowing spirit that can be put upon him.

Finally, I proceed from the lack of good it can do, to the actual harm it causes, by being, primarily, the greatest discouragement and insult that can be offered to learning, and to the learned.

It was the sobbing complaint of the bishops, released at every slight hint of a motion to remove their opportunity for multiple incomes and to distribute more equally Church revenue, that all learning would then be forever dashed and discouraged. As for that opinion, I never found reason to think that even the smallest part of learning stood or fell with the clergy – nor could I ever see it as anything but a sleazy and shameful utterance for any of the church to make while resting on their wealth. Are you against utterly disheartening and frustrating, not the mercenary crew of false pretenders to learning, but the free and sincere sort who were evidently born to study and love learning just for learning, not for money or any other reward beside the service of God and of truth, and perhaps maybe the lasting fame and continuing praise which God and good people have decided shall be the reward of those whose published work advance the good of humankind? Then know this: to distrust so fully the judgement and honesty of one who has but average standing in learning, and has not so far offended, so as to count them unfit to print their mind without tutor and examiner, just in case they drop something divisive or degenerate, is the greatest insult and indignity that can be put upon a free and knowing spirit.

What advantage is it to be a man, over it is to be a boy at school, if we have only escaped the ferula to come under the fescue of an Imprimatur; if serious and elaborate writings, as if they were no more than the theme of a grammar-lad under his pedagogue, must not be uttered without the cursory eyes of a temporizing and extemporizing licenser? He who is not trusted with his own actions, his drift not being known to be evil, and standing to the hazard of law and penalty, has no great argument to think himself reputed in the Commonwealth wherein he was born for other than a fool or a foreigner. When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done he takes himself to be informed in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him. If, in this the most consummate act of his fidelity and ripeness, no years, no industry, no former proof of his abilities can bring him to that state of maturity, as not to be still mistrusted and suspected, unless he carry all his considerate diligence, all his midnight watchings and expense of Palladian oil, to the hasty view of an unleisured licenser, perhaps much his younger, perhaps his inferior in judgement, perhaps one who never knew the labour of bookwriting, and if he be not repulsed or slighted, must appear in print like a puny with his guardian, and his censor's hand on the back of his title to be his bail and surety that he is no idiot or seducer, it cannot be but a dishonour and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of learning.

What is gained by being a grown-up instead of still a child in school if we have simply escaped the teacher's rod for the whip of a licenser's Latin permission? What is the difference, if serious and elaborate writings, as if they were nothing more than the homework of a schoolchild to be looked over by the teacher, must not be published without the glancing, uninterested eyes of a procrastinating, improvising licenser? When not trusted to act even without any reputation for evil, and when facing the arbitrary game of law and punishment, there is no reason to feel regarded, in the Commonwealth that is home, as anything other than a fool or a foreigner. When writing to the world, one summons up all one's reason and contemplation for assistance, searching, meditating, working hard and carefully, questioning and discussing with one's most thoughtful friends. After which, the writing can be done with confidence, and with the feeling of being informed, as informed as any who wrote before on that issue. That is the most total act and demonstration of commitment and readiness. It seems even then that no years, no amount of hard work, no former proof of ability can prove somebody as mature enough to not be mistrusted and suspected, being instead still required to carry their careful effort, all their midnight musings and burnt lamp-light oil, to the hot-headed gaze of a licenser with nothing better to do – perhaps much younger, perhaps inferior in judgement, perhaps having no knowledge of the art and work of book writing. And then, if not rejected or disrespected,

able only to appear in print like a first-year student with their supervisor, the censor's hand behind their title to reassure the reader that the writer is no idiot or seducer. If all that is so, it cannot be anything but a dishonour to and belittling of the author, the book, and the privilege and dignity of learning.

And what if the author shall be one so copious of fancy, as to have many things well worth the adding come into his mind after licensing, while the book is yet under the press, which not seldom happens to the best and diligentest writers; and that perhaps a dozen times in one book? The printer dares not go beyond his licensed copy; so often then must the author trudge to his leave-giver, that those his new insertions may be viewed; and many a jaunt will be made, ere that licenser, for it must be the same man, can either be found, or found at leisure; meanwhile either the press must stand still, which is no small damage, or the author lose his accuratest thoughts, and send the book forth worse than he had made it, which to a diligent writer is the greatest melancholy and vexation that can befall.

And how can a man teach with authority, which is the life of teaching; how can he be a doctor in his book as he ought to be, or else had better be silent, whenas all he teaches, all he delivers, is but under the tuition, under the correction of his patriarchal licenser to blot or alter what precisely accords not with the

And what if the author is one so abundant in imagination that they have many things well worth adding come into their mind after already being licensed, while the book is still under the press, something not rare in the experience of the best and most passionate writers? And what if that happens multiple times for one book? The printer dares not print anything other than the licensed copy. So then must the author often traipse to their approver so the new additions may be viewed, and it may be many a walk before that licenser – as it must be the same person – can either be found, or found with the free time to view them. In the meantime, either the press must stand still and wait, something more than a little harmful, or the author must lose their most up-to-date thoughts, and send out the book worse than it had been made. And that, to a passionate writer, is the greatest sorrow and frustration that can occur.

And how can someone teach with authority, the very life of teaching, or be a doctor in their book as they ought to be – silence would be better otherwise – when all they teach and deliver is but under the tuition and correction of a patriarchal licenser, free to erase or alter that which fits not

hidebound humour which he calls his judgement?

When every acute reader, upon the first sight of a pedantic license, will be ready with these like words to ding the book a quoit's distance from him: I hate a pupil teacher, I endure not an instructor that comes to me under the wardship of an overseeing fist. I know nothing of the licenser, but that I have his own hand here for his arrogance; who shall warrant me his judgement? The State, sir, replies the stationer, but has a quick return: The State shall be my governors, but not my critics; they may be mistaken in the choice of a licenser, as easily as this licenser may be mistaken in an author; this is some common stuff; and he might add from Sir Francis Bacon, "that such authorized books are but the language of the times". For though a licenser should happen to be judicious more than ordinary, which will be a great jeopardy of the next succession, yet his very office and his commission enjoins him to let pass nothing but what is vulgarly received already.

Nay, which is more lamentable, if the work of any deceased author, though never so famous in his lifetime and even to this day, come to their hands for licence to be printed, or reprinted, if there be found in his book one sentence of a venturous edge, uttered in the height of zeal (and who knows whether it might not be the dictate of a divine spirit?) yet not suiting with every low decrepit humour of their own, though it were Knox himself, the reformer of a kingdom, that

perfectly with the narrow-minded whims the licenser calls judgement? When every sharp, perceptive reader will, on first sight of any pompous permission, be ready with words like these to fling the book a javelin's distance from them: "I hate a pupil teacher, I cannot stand an instructor who comes to me under the watch of an overseeing fist. I know nothing of this licenser, besides their own hand as evidence of their arrogance: who will convince me of the licenser's own judgement?" Why, the State, answers the printer, but this has a quick reply: "The State shall be my governors, but not my critics. They may be mistaken in their choice of a licenser, just as easily as this licenser may be wrong about an author – these mistakes are common stuff." And the speaker might add, paraphrasing Sir Francis Bacon, that "such authorised books are but the language of the times." For, even if a licenser happens to be more wise and considerate than usual, which will be a threat posed by future licensers, still their office and their task commands them to let pass nothing, unless it is vulgarity and offence already subjectively accepted by the current status quo.

It is even more regrettable if the work of any dead author, never well known in their own lifetime or even to this day, arrives in their hands for licence to be printed or reprinted. If they find in the book even one sentence with a daring edge to it (and who knows if it is or is not the dictation of a divine spirit?) but which does not fit with their own sordid taste, they will not spare it crossing out, even if it were the Scotsman Knox himself, reformer of a

spake it, they will not pardon him their dash: the sense of that great man shall to all posterity be lost, for the fearfulness or the presumptuous rashness of a perfunctory licenser. And to what an author this violence hath been lately done, and in what book of greatest consequence to be faithfully published, I could now instance, but shall forbear till a more convenient season.

Yet if these things be not resented seriously and timely by them who have the remedy in their power, but that such iron-moulds as these shall have authority to gnaw out the choicest periods of exquisitest books, and to commit such a treacherous fraud against the orphan remainders of worthiest men after death, the more sorrow will belong to that hapless race of men, whose misfortune it is to have understanding. Henceforth let no man care to learn, or care to be more than worldly-wise; for certainly in higher matters to be ignorant and slothful, to be a common steadfast dunce, will be the only pleasant life, and only in request.

And it is a particular disesteem of every knowing person alive, and most injurious to the written labours and monuments of the dead, so to me it seems an undervaluing and vilifying of the whole nation. I cannot set so light by all the invention, the art, the wit, the grave and solid judgement which is in England, as that it can be comprehended in any twenty capacities how good soever, much less that it should not pass except their superintendence be over

kingdom, that spoke the words. And so, the sense and wisdom of a great thinker shall be lost to all future generations, all because of the fearfulness or the arrogant carelessness of an uninterested licenser. I could speak, now, as to what an author this violence has been lately done, and in what book where publication faithful to the original form is of the utmost importance, but I shall instead hold off until a more suitable time.

If all this is not resented seriously and soon by those who have the power to solve it, leaving authority instead to such censorship as this to spread like ink stains on paper, eating away the finest sentences of the most exquisite books and committing such betrayal and injury against the orphan works left behind by the most worthy, then yet more sorrow will belong to our hapless race, whose misfortune it is to have understanding. From here on out, let no-one care to learn or to be more than street-smart. For surely in higher matters, to be ignorant and lazy, to be a common and committed simpleton, will not just be the only pleasant life, but also the only one in demand.

It shows a particularly low opinion of every knowing person alive, and is the greatest slight to the written works and monuments of the dead, so it seems to me to only undervalue and cheapen the whole nation. I cannot consider all the invention, the art, the wit, the serious and solid judgement that is in England as so undemanding that it can be even comprehended fully by any twenty minds, no matter how good, let alone that their supervision

it, except it be sifted and strained with their strainers, that it should be uncurrent without their manual stamp. Truth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopolized and traded in by tickets and statutes and standards. We must not think to make a staple commodity of all knowledge in the land, to mark and licence it like our broadcloth and our woolpacks. What is it but a servitude like that imposed by the Philistines, not to be allowed the sharpening of our own axes and coulters, but we must repair from all quarters to twenty licensing forges? Had anyone written and divulged erroneous things and scandalous to honest life, misusing and forfeiting the esteem had of his reason among men, if after conviction this only censure were adjudged him that he should never henceforth write but what were first examined by an appointed officer, whose hand should be annexed to pass his credit for him that now he might be safely read; it could not be apprehended less than a disgraceful punishment. Whence to include the whole nation, and those that never yet thus offended, under such a diffident and suspicious prohibition, may plainly be understood what a disparagement it is. So much the more, whenas debtors and delinquents may walk abroad without a keeper, but unoffensive books must not stir forth without a visible jailor in their title.

of it should be the only reason it is accepted, having been sifted and strained with their strainers, out of circulation without their manual stamp. Truth and understanding are not products to be monopolised and traded in with receipts, rules, and standards. We must not seek to turn all knowledge in the land into a regulated commodity, marking and licensing it like our cloth and woolpacks. Will we not be then as the Israelites under the Philistines, who were not allowed smiths of their own so as to prevent them from learning the skill of sharpening their axes and plough-blades? Must we, from all quarters, head for the same twenty licensing forges? Had anyone written and spread things untrue, incorrect, and scandalous to common decency, they might be convicted of misusing and forfeiting the reputation of their reason among others. If after conviction the only punishment issued was that the writer must, henceforth, never write anything that was not first examined by an appointed officer, whose signature should be added to reassure all that they may now be safely read, this could not be recognised as anything less than a disgraceful punishment. So then to include the whole nation, and those that have never yet offended, under such a distrusting and suspicious ban can be clearly understood for just how belittling and demeaning it is. Even more so, when considering that those in debt and those who fought for the crown and not for Parliament may walk freely without a warden, yet inoffensive books must not venture out without a visible jailor in their title.

Nor is it to the common people less than a reproach; for if we be so jealous over them, as that we dare not trust them with an English pamphlet, what do we but censure them for a giddy, vicious, and ungrounded people; in such a sick and weak state of faith and discretion, as to be able to take nothing down but through the pipe of a licenser? That this is care or love of them, we cannot pretend, whenas, in those popish places where the laity are most hated and despised, the same strictness is used over them. Wisdom we cannot call it, because it stops but one breach of licence, nor that neither: whenas those corruptions, which it seeks to prevent, break in faster at other doors which cannot be shut.

And in conclusion it reflects to the disrepute of our ministers also, of whose labours we should hope better, and of the proficiency which their flock reaps by them, than that after all this light of the Gospel which is, and is to be, and all this continual preaching, they should still be frequented with such an unprincipled, unedified and laic rabble, as that the whiff of every new pamphlet should stagger them out of their catechism and Christian walking. This may have much reason to discourage the ministers when such a low conceit is had of all their exhortations, and the benefitting of their hearers, as that they are not thought fit to be turned loose to three sheets of paper without a licenser; that all the sermons, all the lectures preached, printed, vented in such numbers, and such volumes, as have now well nigh made all other books unsaleable, should not be armour enough

Nor is it anything less than a scolding to the common people. For if we are to be so doubting and watchful over them, not daring to trust them with an English pamphlet, what do we do but condemn them as a senseless, vicious, and ungrounded people, in so sick and weak a state of faith and judgement that they cannot stomach anything unless from the feeding hand of a licenser? That this is either love or care of them we cannot pretend, not while in those Pope-led places, where the common folk are most hated and despised, they are treated with the same strictness. Wisdom we cannot call it, as it stops only one breach of licence, just as that is undone when the corruptions it seeks to prevent break in faster through other doors that cannot be shut.

Finally, it testifies also to the disgrace of our priests. We should hope better of their work, and of the competence and knowledge gained from it by their followers, than that they, after all this light of the eternal Gospel and all this continual preaching, should still be regularly visited by an unclerical rabble so unprincipled and unenlightened that the whiff of every new pamphlet staggers them out of their learnt doctrine and off the Christian path. It may be a great cause of discouragement to the ministers when such a low opinion is held of all their counselling and cautioning, and of the benefit of it to listeners, that they are not thought fit to be turned loose to even three sheets of paper without a licenser. When all the sermons, all the lectures preached, printed, and aired, in such numbers and such volumes to

against one single Enchiridion, without the castle of St. Angelo of an Imprimatur.

And lest some should persuade ye, Lords and Commons, that these arguments of learned men's discouragement at this your Order are mere flourishes, and not real, I could recount what I have seen and heard in other countries, where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes; when I have sat among their learned men, for that honour I had, and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom, as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damped the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had been there written now these many years but flattery and fustian. There it was that I found and visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition, for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought. And though I knew that England then was groaning loudest under the prelatical yoke, nevertheless I took it as a pledge of future happiness, that other nations were so persuaded of her liberty. Yet was it beyond my hope that those worthies were then breathing in her air, who should be her leaders to such a deliverance, as shall never be forgotten by any revolution of time that this world hath to finish. When that was once begun, it was as little in my fear that what words of complaint I heard among learned men of other parts uttered

the point now of nearly making all other books unsaleable, are not considered armour enough against a single handbook if it is not held prisoner behind the bars of a licenser's stamp, as if in the Papal prison of Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome.

And to avoid you being persuaded, Lords and Commons, that these arguments detailing the discouragement of the educated at this Order of yours are mere exaggerations for effect, and not the reality, I could recount what I have seen and heard in other countries, where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes. I could speak of when I have sat among their own learned people (for that is an honour I had) and been considered fortunate to be born in such a place of free thinking, as they believed England was, while they themselves only mourned the condition into which learning had been brought in their lives, complaining that this situation had dampened the glory of Italian wit and wisdom, and resulted in nothing being written all these years, besides pretentious words and flattery. T'was there that I found and visited the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking differently in astronomy to the way those Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought. And though I knew that England was then suffering its greatest under the bishop's tyranny, that other nations were so convinced of its liberty is something I took as a promise of future happiness. Yet it was beyond my hopes that, already breathing in England's air, were those who would be leaders to that promised deliverance, never to be forgotten by any cycle of time that this

against the Inquisition, the same I should hear by as learned men at home, uttered in time of Parliament against an order of licensing; and that so generally that, when I had disclosed myself a companion of their discontent, I might say, if without envy, that he whom an honest quaestorship had endeared to the Sicilians was not more by them importuned against Verres, than the favourable opinion which I had among many who honour ye, and are known and respected by ye, loaded me with entreaties and persuasions, that I would not despair to lay together that which just reason should bring into my mind, toward the removal of an undeserved thralldom upon learning. That this is not therefore the disburdening of a particular fancy, but the common grievance of all those who had prepared their minds and studies above the vulgar pitch to advance truth in others, and from others to entertain it, thus much may satisfy.

And in their name I shall for neither friend nor foe conceal what the general murmur is; that if it come to inquisitioning again and licensing, and that we are so timorous of ourselves, and so suspicious of all men, as to fear each book and the shaking of every leaf, before we know what the contents are; if some who but of late were little better than silenced from

world has to finish. Once that deliverance had begun, it was just as beyond my fears that the words of complaint against inquisition I heard among the learned of other places would be echoed by those just as learned at home, and uttered against an order of licensing in the time of Parliament. I never feared that those echoes and utterances would be so widespread that, when I admitted I was a companion of their discontent, I was loaded with pleas and requests for me to have the courage to pull and piece together all that sound reasoning could bring together in my mind to argue for the removal of an undeserved enslavement of learning. I might humbly say that even Cicero of Rome, having endeared himself as a public official to the Sicilians, did not have more support against the cruel and unjust Verres than the favourable opinion I had among many who honour you, and are known and respected by you, and were among the many offering those pleas and requests. There is much to show, therefore, that this speech is not the unloading of a particular and personal grievance, but the shared grievance of all those who had prepared their minds and studies above the common level to advance truth in others, and to receive it from others.

And in their name I shall not conceal, neither from friend nor foe, what the general whisperings are: if it is to come again to licensing and inquisition, if we are to be so uncertain of ourselves and so suspicious of all others that we fear each book and the turning of every page before we even know the contents, if those who recently were essentially

## Areopagitica

preaching shall come now to silence us from reading, except what they please, it cannot be guessed what is intended by some but a second tyranny over learning: and will soon put it out of controversy, that bishops and presbyters are the same to us, both name and thing. That those evils of prelaty, which before from five or six and twenty sees were distributively charged upon the whole people, will now light wholly upon learning, is not obscure to us: whenas now the pastor of a small unlearned parish on the sudden shall be exalted archbishop over a large diocese of books, and yet not remove, but keep his other cure too, a mystical pluralist. He who but of late cried down the sole ordination of every novice Bachelor of Art, and denied sole jurisdiction over the simplest parishioner, shall now at home in his private chair assume both these over worthiest and excellentest books and ablest authors that write them.

This is not, ye Covenants and Protestations that we have made! this is not to put down prelaty; this is but to chop an episcopacy; this is but to translate the Palace Metropolitan from one kind of dominion into another; this is but an old canonical sleight of commuting our penance. To startle thus betimes at a mere unlicensed pamphlet will after a while be afraid of every conventicle, and a while after will make a conventicle of every Christian meeting. But I am

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

silenced from preaching their Christianity shall now begin to silence us from reading anything beyond what they please, then it can only be assumed that the intention of some is a second tyranny over learning, and it will soon settle the debate over the difference between the Catholic bishops and the reforming Presbyterians: they will be the same to us, in name and character. That those evil practices, previously heaped evenly upon the whole population from twenty-five or -six regions of church authority, will now fall fully upon learning is not hidden from us. Suddenly now the pastor of a small uneducated parish is to be exalted Archbishop over a vast congregation of books, yet keeping that first post alongside the new: a miracle of double-office. They who, in recent times, successfully protested the idea that only university graduates could be ordained, and denied that such singular power and sole authority could be held by the bishops over the simplest parishioner, shall now, at home in their private chairs, perform both of these things over the most worthy and excellent books, and over the most able authors who write them.

We have made covenants and protestations against the rule of bishops, yet this Order is not to stamp out theocracy, it is to exchange one for another kind! It is to merely move the palace of the Archbishop from one type of dominion to another, an illusion and an old canonical trick to simply swap the sin we're guilty of. To be so shocked so quickly at a mere unlicensed pamphlet will lead, after a while, to the fear of every unconventional

## Areopagitica

certain that a State governed by the rules of justice and fortitude, or a Church built and founded upon the rock of faith and true knowledge, cannot be so pusillanimous. While things are yet not constituted in religion, that freedom of writing should be restrained by a discipline imitated from the prelates and learnt by them from the Inquisition, to shut us up all again into the breast of a licenser, must needs give cause of doubt and discouragement to all learned and religious men.

Who cannot but discern the fineness of this politic drift, and who are the contrivers; that while bishops were to be baited down, then all presses might be open; it was the people's birthright and privilege in time of Parliament, it was the breaking forth of light. But now, the bishops abrogated and voided out of the Church, as if our Reformation sought no more but to make room for others into their seats under another name, the episcopal arts begin to bud again, the cruse of truth must run no more oil, liberty of printing must be enthralled again under a prelatical commission of twenty, the privilege of the people nullified, and, which is worse, the freedom of learning must groan again, and to her old fetters: all this the Parliament yet sitting. Although their own late arguments and defences against the prelates might remember them, that this obstructing violence meets for the most part with an event utterly opposite to the end which it drives at: instead of suppressing sects and schisms, it raises them and invests them with a reputation. The

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

assembly – and it will not be long until that fear has made an unconventional assembly out of every Christian meeting. But I am certain that a State governed by the rules of justice and persevering patience, or a Church built and founded upon the rock of faith and true knowledge, cannot be so anxious and afraid. While such power is being stripped from religion, that freedom of writing should be restrained by practices imitated from the bishops who learnt them from the Inquisition, to shut us all up once more into the licenser's hands, must give cause for doubt and discouragement to all the learned and religious.

Who would fail to recognise the excellence of this turn of politics, and of the ones responsible, that with the bishops being chased to submission, all the presses might now be opened: it was the people's birth right and privilege under Parliament, it was the breaking forth of light. But now, even with the bishops overruled and driven out of the Church, it is as if our Reformation sought nothing more than to make room for others to take their seats under another name. The Catholic arts begin to bud again, the pot of truth must be allowed to turn cold, the freedom of the press must be enslaved again under a commission of twenty quasi-bishops, the privilege of the people cancelled-out, and, worst of all, the freedom of learning must groan again in its old chains: all this with Parliament still sitting. Their very own recent arguments and defences against the clergy might remind them that this violent obstruction meets for the most part with an outcome utterly opposite

## Areopagitica

punishing of wits enhances their authority, saith the Viscount St. Albans; and a forbidden writing is thought to be a certain spark of truth that flies up in the faces of them who seek to tread it out. This Order, therefore, may prove a nursing-mother to sects, but I shall easily show how it will be a step-dame to Truth: and first by disabling us to the maintenance of what is known already.

Well knows he who uses to consider, that our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion. Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believe things only because his pastor says so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.

There is not any burden that some would gladlier post off to another than the charge and care of their religion. There be – who knows not that there be? – of Protestants and professors who live and die in as arrant an implicit faith as any lay Papist of Loretto. A

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

to the one it strives for: instead of suppressing sects and movements, it raises them up and clothes them with a reputation. To paraphrase, once more, Sir Francis Bacon: the punishing of minds enhances their authority, and once a writing's forbidden, it is considered to contain some spark of truth that must be flying up into the face of those who seek to stamp it out. This Order may therefore prove a nursing-mother to sects. But I shall show with ease how it will be a stepmother to Truth. Firstly, by preventing and freeing us from the support and upkeep of what is known already.

As one who exercises them well knows, our faith and knowledge thrive by being exercised, just as with our physical health. Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain: if its waters do not flow continuously onward, they sicken instead into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A person may be a heretic even when on the side of truth. If they believe things only because the shepherd says so, or because the Assembly of Divines in Westminster – a whole council of shepherds – decides and declares it, and knows no other reason for their belief or opinion, then even when that belief or opinion is true, the very truth they hold becomes their heresy.

There is no burden that some would be happier to hand off to another than the responsibility and care of their religion. There are – and who does not know this? – Protestants and Puritans who live and die in a faith as thoroughly based in blind trust as

wealthy man, addicted to his pleasure and to his profits, finds religion to be a traffic so entangled, and of so many piddling accounts, that of all mysteries he cannot skill to keep a stock going upon that trade. What should he do? fain he would have the name to be religious, fain he would bear up with his neighbours in that. What does he therefore, but resolves to give over toiling, and to find himself out some factor, to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs; some divine of note and estimation that must be. To him he adheres, resigns the whole warehouse of his religion, with all the locks and keys, into his custody; and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion; esteems his associating with him a sufficient evidence and commendatory of his own piety. So that a man may say his religion is now no more within himself, but is become a dividual movable, and goes and comes near him, according as that good man frequents the house. He entertains him, gives him gifts, feasts him, lodges him; his religion comes home at night, prays, is liberally supped, and sumptuously laid to sleep; rises, is saluted, and after the malmsey, or some well-spiced brewage, and better breakfasted than he whose morning appetite would have gladly fed on green figs between Bethany and Jerusalem, his religion walks abroad at eight, and leaves his kind entertainer in the shop trading all day without his religion.

any Catholic pilgrim to Loretto, seeking the house where Mary was born and Christ conceived, apparently transported there from Nazareth by angels. A wealthy person, addicted to pleasure and profit, finds religion to be an affair so messy that, of all trades, it is this one that cannot be managed and kept stocked up and running. What should be done? They are eager to be labelled religious, and compelled to persist in that with their neighbours. So what is done? They decide to quit struggling and find some agent, to whose care and credibility the whole managing of religious affairs can be committed. That must be some divine person of quality and good judgement. This agent is obeyed, the whole warehouse of religion resigned, with all the locks and keys, into their custody, turning the very person of that agent into the religion, and this association with a holy person is considered to be sufficient evidence and approval of personal devotion to the faith. So that one may say their religion is no longer within them, but has become a transferable commodity, coming near and going, depending on when that holy person frequents the house. There the religion is entertained, given gifts and feasts, and is lodged; it comes home at night, prays, is well fed and lavishly put to sleep. It rises, is saluted. And, after the morning wine or some well-spiced brew, and after being better breakfasted than Christ himself, that holy person, one's whole religion, walks out of doors at eight, leaving the kind host to work and trade all day without it.

## Areopagitica

Another sort there be who, when they hear that all things shall be ordered, all things regulated and settled, nothing written but what passes through the custom-house of certain publicans that have the tonnaging and poundaging of all free-spoken truth, will straight give themselves up into your hands, make 'em and cut 'em out what religion ye please: there be delights, there be recreations and jolly pastimes that will fetch the day about from sun to sun, and rock the tedious year as in a delightful dream. What need they torture their heads with that which others have taken so strictly and so unalterably into their own purveying? These are the fruits which a dull ease and cessation of our knowledge will bring forth among the people. How goodly and how to be wished were such an obedient unanimity as this, what a fine conformity would it starch us all into! Doubtless a staunch and solid piece of framework, as any January could freeze together.

Nor much better will be the consequence even among the clergy themselves. It is no new thing never heard of before, for a parochial minister, who has his reward and is at his Hercules' pillars in a warm benefice, to be easily inclinable, if he have nothing else that may rouse up to his studies, to finish his circuit in an English Concordance and a topic folio, the gatherings and savings of a sober graduateship, a Harmony and a Catena; treading the constant round of certain common doctrinal heads, attended with their uses, motives, marks, and means, out of which, as out of an

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

There is another sort who, when they hear that all things shall be ordered, regulated, and settled, with nothing written that has not passed through the customs-station of certain officials who collect their tax on all free-spoken truth, will give themselves up, at once, into your hands, mould 'em and cut 'em out as whatever religion you please. There are delights and distractions, pleasures and pleasant pastimes that will seize and occupy the day from sun to sun, and sway the long and tiresome year in a delightful dream. Why should they torture their heads with things that others have taken, strictly and unalterably, for themselves to attend to and to supply? These are the fruits that a numbing ease and an end to the growth of our knowledge will produce among the people. How wonderful and desirable would be such an obedient unity as this, what a fine conformity it would stiffen us all into! Undoubtedly a steadfast and solid piece of framework, as fixed as anything any cold winter's January could freeze together.

Nor will the consequences be any better among the clergy themselves. It is not some new, unheard of thing for a local minister, having gotten their reward and tenure, and planted their pillars to mark the limits of their ambition, to be easily tempted to end their education, if they have nothing else that might reawaken the curiosity for study, with an English index and a notebook full of quotes – the gatherings and savings of a sensible, conventional career as student. With these and a synthesis of the Gospels, and a list of authorities to

alphabet, or sol-fa, by forming and transforming, joining and disjoining variously, a little bookcraft, and two hours' meditation, might furnish him unspeakably to the performance of more than a weekly charge of sermoning: not to reckon up the infinite helps of interlinearies, breviaries, synopses, and other loitering gear. But as for the multitude of sermons ready printed and piled up, on every text that is not difficult, our London trading St. Thomas in his vestry, and add to boot St. Martin and St. Hugh, have not within their hallowed limits more vendible ware of all sorts ready made: so that penury he never need fear of pulpit provision, having where so plenteously to refresh his magazine. But if his rear and flanks be not impaled, if his back door be not secured by the rigid licenser, but that a bold book may now and then issue forth and give the assault to some of his old collections in their trenches, it will concern him then to keep waking, to stand in watch, to set good guards and sentinels about his received opinions, to walk the round and counter-round with his fellow inspectors, fearing lest any of his flock be seduced, who also then would be better instructed, better exercised and disciplined. And God send that the fear of this diligence, which must then be used, do not make us affect the laziness of a licensing Church.

refer to, they can wander the endless round of the usual voices in doctrine, being served with their practices, motives, notes, and resources. Out of which, just as out of an alphabet or a musical scale, by forming and transforming, by variously putting together and taking apart, with a little book-craft and two hours of meditation, the performing of more than a week's worth of sermons could be indescribably well provided for. This is not even taking into account the infinite help of a slew of other texts with summaries, side-by-side translations, outlines and guides, and other time-saving tricks of the lazy student. And as for the multitude of sermons, on every text that is not difficult, ready printed and piled up, our London markets that are so close and attached to St. Thomas, St. Martin, and St. Hugh do not have anything else fit for sale within their hallowed limits that is more available and ready-made. So the minister never need fear scarcity of pulpit provision, having such plenty so close by with which to refill on ammunition. But if the rear and sides are not barricaded, if the back door is not secured by the rigid licenser, and a bold book may approach, every now and then, to launch an assault on some of the old collections in their trenches, this will concern the shepherd enough to stay awake and vigilant, to stand in watch and set good guards and sentinels around the already received opinions, to patrol back and forth with fellow inspectors, fearful that any of the flock may be seduced – a flock who would also then be better instructed, exercised, and disciplined. May God ensure that the fear that drives this careful

For if we be sure we are in the right, and do not hold the truth guiltily, which becomes not, if we ourselves condemn not our own weak and frivolous teaching, and the people for an untaught and irreligious gadding rout, what can be more fair than when a man judicious, learned, and of a conscience, for aught we know, as good as theirs that taught us what we know, shall not privily from house to house, which is more dangerous, but openly by writing publish to the world what his opinion is, what his reasons, and wherefore that which is now thought cannot be sound? Christ urged it as wherewith to justify himself, that he preached in public; yet writing is more public than preaching; and more easy to refutation, if need be, there being so many whose business and profession merely it is to be the champions of truth; which if they neglect, what can be imputed but their sloth, or inability?

Thus much we are hindered and disinured by this course of licensing, toward the true knowledge of what we seem to know. For how much it hurts and hinders the licensers themselves in the calling of their ministry, more than any secular employment, if they will discharge that office as they ought, so that of necessity they must neglect either the one duty or the

attention, which must then be used, prevents us from adopting the laziness of a licensing and censorious Church.

For if we do not hold the truth with a guilty conscience, which is unbecoming, and are sure we are in the right, and if we do not condemn our own teaching as weak and worthless, nor regard the public as a wandering, disorderly crowd of the immoral and the ignorant, then what could be more fair than allowing someone wise, thoughtful, educated, and, for all we know, in possession of a conscience just as good as any of those who taught us what we know, to publish openly to the world in writing what their opinion is, why they think it, and why current thinking is not well founded? It would be far more dangerous were they to have to do this privately, from house to house. Christ, in justifying himself, brought attention to the fact that he preached in public, speaking openly to the world. Yet writing is more public than preaching, and easier to challenge and refute, if need be, as there are so many around whose sole business and profession it is to be champions of truth: if they fail to do this, what else can be blamed besides their laziness or inability?

Thus, by this course of licensing, we are held back and put out of practice, cut off from and unaccustomed to true knowledge of the things we seem to know. Given how much it hurts and hinders the licensers themselves in their religious calling as ministers, more than any secular employment could, they ought to abandon one

## Areopagitica

other, I insist not, because it is a particular, but leave it to their own conscience, how they will decide it there.

There is yet behind of what I purposed to lay open, the incredible loss and detriment that this plot of licensing puts us to; more than if some enemy at sea should stop up all our havens and ports and creeks, it hinders and retards the importation of our richest merchandise, truth; nay, it was first established and put in practice by Antichristian malice and mystery on set purpose to extinguish, if it were possible, the light of Reformation, and to settle falsehood; little differing from that policy wherewith the Turk upholds his Alcoran, by the prohibition of printing. 'Tis not denied, but gladly confessed, we are to send our thanks and vows to Heaven louder than most of nations, for that great measure of truth which we enjoy, especially in those main points between us and the Pope, with his appurtenances the prelates: but he who thinks we are to pitch our tent here, and have attained the utmost prospect of reformation that the mortal glass wherein we contemplate can show us, till we come to beatific vision, that man by this very opinion declares that he is yet far short of truth.

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

position or the other, otherwise they will, out of necessity, neglect their duties as either licenser or minister. I do not insist on which position they let go of: how that will be decided is something particular to each and their own conscience.

And behind all this that I aimed to lay out and open is the unbelievable loss and sustained harm that this plan to license brings us toward. More than if some seafaring foe were to block all our ports and bays and harbours, it delays and frustrates the importing of our most valuable merchandise: truth. No, it was first established and put into practice by Catholic anti-Christian hateful resentment and trickery, set on extinguishing, if possible, the light of Reformation and to silence falsehood, hardly differing from the policy of prohibiting printing through which Muslim authorities preserve and protect the Qur'an. Rather than denying, it is to be gladly confessed that we owe thanks and promises to Heaven louder than most nations for the great amount of truth that we enjoy, especially in those crucial quarrels between us and the Pope, with those accessories of his, the bishops. But anyone who thinks we are to pitch our tent here at this summit, and that we have before us the fullest view of progress that the mortal lens we use can show us, until we pass on to more blessed vision, by that very opinion do they declare that they are still far short of truth.

Truth did, indeed, come into the world with its divine Master, Christ, and held a perfect shape most glorious to look upon. But when he ascended,

## Areopagitica

were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb, still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection. Suffer not these licensing prohibitions to stand at every place of opportunity, forbidding and disturbing them that continue seeking, that continue to do our obsequies to the torn body of our martyred saint.

We boast our light; but if we look not wisely on the sun itself, it smites us into darkness. Who can discern those planets that are oft combust, and those stars of brightest magnitude that rise and set with the sun, until the opposite motion of their orbs bring them to such a place in the firmament, where they may be seen evening or morning? The light which we have gained was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge. It is not the unfrocking of a priest, the unmitring of a bishop, and the removing him from off

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

and once his followers, after him, were laid to rest, there immediately arose a wicked dynasty of deceivers, who dealt with the virgin Truth just as the Egyptian Typhon and his collaborators dealt with their god in the story of Osiris: they cut its lovely form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time and ever since, the saddened friends of Truth, at least the ones who dared appear, set about imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, by gathering up, piece by piece and limb by limb, anything of Truth that they could find. We still have not found it all, Lords and Commons, nor will we ever, until its Master's second coming: he shall bring together every joint and limb, and mould them into an immortal form of beauty and perfection. Do not allow these licensing prohibitions, this censorship, to stand at every place of opportunity and forbid and disturb any who continue searching, those that continue to conduct our rites and ceremony to the torn body of our martyred saint.

We boast of our light, but if we look unwisely at the sun itself, it strikes us into darkness. No one can make out those planets closest to the sun, nor those other brightest shining stars that rise and set with it, until the differing motion of their orbits brings them to such a place in the sky that they may be seen evening or morning. The light that we have gained was given to us, not so we would be forever staring at it, but so that by that light we could discover yet more things even further from our current knowledge. To de-frock the priest, to

## Areopagitica

the presbyterian shoulders, that will make us a happy nation. No, if other things as great in the Church, and in the rule of life both economical and political, be not looked into and reformed, we have looked so long upon the blaze that Zuinglius and Calvin hath beacons up to us, that we are stark blind. There be who perpetually complain of schisms and sects, and make it such a calamity that any man dissents from their maxims. 'Tis their own pride and ignorance which causes the disturbing, who neither will hear with meekness, nor can convince; yet all must be suppressed which is not found in their Syntagma. They are the troublers, they are the dividers of unity, who neglect and permit not others to unite those dissevered pieces which are yet wanting to the body of Truth. To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneal and proportional), this is the golden rule in theology as well as in arithmetic, and makes up the best harmony in a Church; not the force and outward union of cold, and neutral, and inwardly divided minds.

Lords and Commons of England! consider what nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governors: a nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

strip the bishop of their rank and headdress, and remove them from where they stamp down upon reform, is not enough to make us a happy nation. No, if other equally problematic things, both within the Church and in the economic and political governing of life, are not looked into and reformed, then we have gazed into the light that reformers like Zwingli and Calvin have shone toward us for so long that we are now severely blind. There are those who never stop complaining about sects and division, and make it such a tragedy and disaster if anyone differs with and diverges from their beliefs and sayings. It is their own pride and ignorance that causes the resulting disturbance, when they will neither listen with patience, nor be open to changing their minds. Instead, everything that is not found within their collected dogma must be suppressed. They are the problem, they are the dividers of unity, those who search not, and do not allow others to unite those still severed pieces, missing from the body of Truth. To still be searching for what we do not know by using what we do, still piecing together truth with truth as we find it (for all its body is made up, in equal parts, of truth), this is the golden rule in theology as well as in arithmetic. And it is this that creates the best harmony in a church or nation, not the forced and public unity of inactive, indifferent, and inwardly divided minds.

Lords and Commons of England, consider the nation you are from, and of which you are the governors! A nation not slow and stupid, but possessed by a spirit intelligent and quick,

and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to.

Therefore the studies of learning in her deepest sciences have been so ancient and so eminent among us, that writers of good antiquity and ablest judgement have been persuaded that even the school of Pythagoras and the Persian wisdom took beginning from the old philosophy of this island. And that wise and civil Roman, Julius Agricola, who governed once here for Caesar, preferred the natural wits of Britain before the laboured studies of the French. Nor is it for nothing that the grave and frugal Transylvanian sends out yearly from as far as the mountainous borders of Russia, and beyond the Hercynian wilderness, not their youth, but their staid men, to learn our language and our theologic arts.

Yet that which is above all this, the favour and the love of Heaven, we have great argument to think in a peculiar manner propitious and propending towards us. Why else was this nation chosen before any other, that out of her, as out of Sion, should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all Europe? And had it not been the obstinate perverseness of our prelates against the divine and admirable spirit of Wickliff, to suppress him as a schismatic and innovator, perhaps neither the Bohemian Huns and Jerome, no nor the name of Luther or of Calvin, had been ever known: the glory of

innovative and perceptive, sharp in invention, bringing skill, toughness, and subtlety to debate, and not beneath the reach of any of the highest points that human capacity can soar to. It is because the most foundational sciences and philosophies within the study of learning have been among us for so long and so outstandingly that writers of best judgement from the greatest periods before ours have been convinced that even the school of Pythagoras and the wisdom of the Persians learnt, early on, from the old thinking of this island. The wise and civil Roman, Julius Agricola, who once governed Britain for several Caesars, preferred our natural wits to the laborious studies of the French. And it is not for nothing that the careful and cautious Transylvanians take not their youth, but their serious adults, and sends them out yearly, from as far as the mountainous borders of Russia and beyond the wilderness of the German forests, to learn our language and our studies of theology.

Yet above all of this, we have good reason to think that the favour and the love of Heaven inclines toward us in a unique and favourable manner. Why else was this nation chosen before any other to be the one that the first tidings and trumpets of the Reformation, as if out of Jerusalem, should be proclaimed and sounded out of to all of Europe? And if it had not been for the stubborn obstructive behaviour of our bishops against the divine and admirable spirit of John Wycliffe, suppressing him as a divider and innovator, perhaps neither Jerome of Prague nor Jan Hus, the Bohemian Reformers, no

## Areopagitica

reforming all our neighbours had been completely ours. But now, as our obdurate clergy have with violence demeaned the matter, we are become hitherto the latest and the backwardest scholars, of whom God offered to have made us the teachers. Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, even to the reforming of Reformation itself: what does he then but reveal himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his Englishmen? I say, as his manner is, first to us, though we mark not the method of his counsels, and are unworthy.

Behold now this vast city: a city of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas 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 soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

nor the names of Luther or Calvin, would have ever been known or needed. The glory of reforming all our neighbours would have been completely ours. But, as our unbending clergy have led the way in the matter with violence, we have become now the slowest students falling furthest behind, when God had offered to make us the teachers. Now once again, by all signs coinciding, and by the general instinct of the holy and the devout, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is deciding to begin some new and great period in his Church, to even reform Reformation itself: how else does he do this but through revealing himself to his servants, and first, as is his way, to the English? I say that his way is to reveal it first to us, even though we do not acknowledge the methods he uses to do it with, and are unworthy of it.

Behold now this vast city: a city of refuge and shelter for those persecuted in their own countries, a mansion house of freedom, embraced and surrounded by his protection. There are more pens and minds, sat by their committed lamps, thinking, searching, throwing around new notions and ideas to present to the approaching Reformation with their honour and allegiance, and others studiously reading, trying all things, endorsing the force of reason and convincing argument, than there are anvils and hammers working within the shop of war to fashion out the armour and the instruments of justice in defence of truth under siege. What more could one require from a nation so willing and inclined to seek after knowledge? What else is needed by such a

of worthies? We reckon more than five months yet to harvest; there need not be five weeks; had we but eyes to lift up, the fields are white already.

Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism, we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirred up in this city. What some lament of, we rather should rejoice at, should rather praise this pious forwardness among men, to reassume the ill-deputed care of their religion into their own hands again. A little generous prudence, a little forbearance of one another, and some grain of charity might win all these diligences to join, and unite in one general and brotherly search after truth; could we but forgo this prelatial tradition of crowding free consciences and Christian liberties into canons and precepts of men. I doubt not, if some great and worthy stranger should come among us, wise to discern the mould and temper of a people, and how to govern it, observing the high hopes and aims, the diligent alacrity of our extended thoughts and reasonings in the pursuance of truth and freedom, but that he would cry out as Pyrrhus did, admiring the Roman docility and courage: If such were my Epirots, I would not despair the greatest design that could be attempted, to make a Church or kingdom happy.

promising and pregnant soil, besides wise and committed workers to produce an educated and worthy people, a nation of prophets, of teachers? We calculate more than five months yet to harvest, when there need not be five weeks: if we only had eyes to lift and see, the fields are white already.

Where there is much desire to learn, there will be, as there needs to be, much arguing, much writing, many opinions – for opinion in good people is but knowledge in the making. Acting under these imagined terrors of division and divisiveness, we wrong the sincere and passionate thirst after knowledge and understanding which God has stirred up in this city. What some complain of, we should instead rejoice at. We should praise this faithful courage among people that leads them to take back the poorly managed care of their religion into their own hands again. A little common sense, a little tolerance of one another, and some grains of goodwill, might succeed in joining all these committed movements together into one common and amicable search for truth, if only we could drop this bishop's tradition of cramming free minds and Christian liberties into rules, doctrines, and dogmas. When Pyrrhus saw and admired the courage and the willingness to learn of the Romans he had conquered, he cried out. If some great and worthy stranger were to come among us, with the wisdom to detect the character and qualities of a people and how best they should be governed, when observing the high hopes and aims, and the determined eagerness, of our advanced thoughts and reasoning in the pursuit of truth and freedom,

I do not doubt that they would cry out as Pyrrhus did. If these lands were mine, I would not hope for less than the greatest design that could be attempted to make a church or kingdom happy.

Yet these are the men cried out against for schismatics and sectaries; as if, while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that, out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure.

Let us therefore be more considerate builders, more wise in spiritual architecture, when great reformation is expected. For now the time seems come, wherein Moses the great prophet may sit in heaven rejoicing to see that memorable and glorious wish of his fulfilled, when not only our seventy elders, but all the Lord's people, are become prophets. No marvel then

Yet these, those who are keen for learning and truth, are the people being cried out against as the members and promoters of sects. It is as if there were some sort of irrational person while the temple of the Lord was being built, with some doing the cutting, some squaring the marble, others felling the trees for wood, who could not comprehend or accept that there must be these different groups and separations made in the construction site before the house of God can be finished. And when every stone is laid artfully together, they cannot be united into one continuous thing, but can only be adjacent to one another in this world, just as all the pieces of the building together cannot become one form. No, instead the perfection consists in this: that, out of many moderated varieties and respectful differences that are not wildly out of proportion with one another, arises the good and graceful symmetry that makes the whole pile and structure admirable.

So let us be more thoughtful builders, wiser in spiritual architecture, when great reformation is expected. For now the time seems to have come when the great prophet Moses may sit in heaven rejoicing, seeing that his memorable and glorious wish, for a time when all the Lord's people, not only our elders, are become prophets, is being

though some men, and some good men too perhaps, but young in goodness, as Joshua then was, envy them. They fret, and out of their own weakness are in agony, lest these divisions and subdivisions will undo us. The adversary again applauds, and waits the hour: when they have branched themselves out, saith he, small enough into parties and partitions, then will be our time. Fool! he sees not the firm root, out of which we all grow, though into branches: nor will beware until he see our small divided maniples cutting through at every angle of his ill-united and unwieldy brigade. And that we are to hope better of all these supposed sects and schisms, and that we shall not need that solicitude, honest perhaps, though over-timorous, of them that vex in this behalf, but shall laugh in the end at those malicious applauders of our differences, I have these reasons to persuade me.

First, when a city shall be as it were besieged and blocked about, her navigable river infested, inroads and incursions round, defiance and battle oft rumoured to be marching up even to her walls and suburb trenches, that then the people, or the greater part, more than at other times, wholly taken up with the study of highest and most important matters to be reformed, should be disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, even to a rarity and admiration, things not before discoursed or written of, argues first a singular goodwill, contentedness and confidence in your prudent foresight and safe

fulfilled. No wonder then that these people are envied by some, even envied, perhaps, by good people, only immature in their goodness, just as Joshua was. They worry and, due to their own weakness, are in agony, thinking that these divisions will undo us. The adversary again applauds, and the fallen angel awaits the hour, saying: "When they have branched themselves out enough, into small and divided parties, then will be our time." Fool! He does not see the firm root out of which we all grow, even if we grow into branches. Nor will he be aware of this until he sees our small, divided groups cutting at every angle through his single, poorly united, and unmanageable brigade. Why am I persuaded that we should be more hopeful with all these supposed divisions and sects? And that we shall not need this perhaps honest, but overly fearful worrying, but will laugh in the end at those who see our differences and applaud with malice? I have these reasons.

First, because of the example Londoners set when the Royalist army threatened our city, with the city besieged and surrounded as it was, clear and open river infested, attacks and raids all around, opposition and battle rumoured often to be marching up even to the walls and trenches of the suburbs. That during this the people (or most, at least) were absorbed even more than usual in the study of highest and most important matters needing reformation, that they were disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discussing, even, rarely and admirably, things not discussed or

## Areopagitica

government, Lords and Commons; and from thence derives itself to a gallant bravery and well-grounded contempt of their enemies, as if there were no small number of as great spirits among us, as his was, who when Rome was nigh besieged by Hannibal, being in the city, bought that piece of ground at no cheap rate, whereon Hannibal himself encamped his own regiment.

Next, it is a lively and cheerful presage of our happy success and victory. For as in a body, when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and vigorous, not only to vital but to rational faculties, and those in the acutest and the pertest operations of wit and subtlety, it argues in what good plight and constitution the body is; so when the cheerfulness of the people is so sprightly up, as that it has not only wherewith to guard well its own freedom and safety, but to spare, and to bestow upon the solidest and sublimest points of controversy and new invention, it betokens us not degenerated, nor drooping to a fatal decay, but casting off the old and wrinkled skin of corruption to outlive these pangs and wax young again, entering the glorious ways of truth and prosperous virtue, destined to become great and honourable in these latter ages. Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long-

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

written about before, is a demonstration of remarkable goodwill, and of satisfaction and confidence in your wise foresight and safe government, Lords and Commons. And from this flows a remarkable bravery and quite justified disrespect toward their enemies, as if among us there were no shortage of great spirits – as great as the spirit of that citizen who was present when Rome was near surrounded by Hannibal, and demonstrated Roman confidence by buying, for the normal price, the piece of ground that Hannibal himself had camped his own troops upon.

Next, it is a lively and pleasant sign of our happy success and victory. In a body, when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and healthy, it demonstrates what good condition and health the body is in, not only to the organs but to the mind, and those parts of the mind taken up by the sharpest and liveliest processes of wit and ingenuity. Just in this way, it indicates we are not degenerated, nor slipping into a deadly decay, when the cheerfulness of the people is so animated, to the point where we have not only the ability to guard well our own freedom and safety, but enough to spare so to devote it to the strongest and most dignified points of discussion, disagreement, and new thought and invention. Instead of degeneration and decay, it is the casting off of the old and wrinkled skin of corruption to outlive these pains and grow young again, entering the glorious ways of truth and fruitful virtue, destined to become great and honourable in these later years. I think I see in my mind a noble and capable nation lifting itself like

## Areopagitica

abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.

What would ye do then? should ye suppress all this flowery crop of knowledge and new light sprung up and yet springing daily in this city? Should ye set an oligarchy of twenty engrossers over it, to bring a famine upon our minds again, when we shall know nothing but what is measured to us by their bushel? Believe it, Lords and Commons, they who counsel ye to such a suppressing do as good as bid ye suppress yourselves; and I will soon show how. If it be desired to know the immediate cause of all this free writing and free speaking, there cannot be assigned a truer than your own mild and free and humane government. It is the liberty, Lords and Commons, which your own valorous and happy counsels have purchased us, liberty which is the nurse of all great wits; this is that which hath rarefied and enlightened our spirits like the influence of heaven; this is that which hath enfranchised, enlarged and lifted up our apprehensions, degrees above themselves.

## Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

somebody strong after sleep, and shaking its invincible head. I think I see the nation as an eagle grooming its mighty youth, and lighting its eyes, unfazed, at the full midday sun, cleansing its long-abused sight, freeing it of scales, at the fountain of heavenly radiance itself. All while the noisy band of fearful and flocking birds, including those who love the twilight of sunset, flutter about, shocked at this eagle and what it signifies, and in their jealous babbling they would predict a year of division and disruption.

What would you do then? Should you suppress all this abundant flowering of knowledge and new light that has sprung up and is still springing up daily in this city? Should you set an elite few of twenty over it to monopolise, to bring a famine upon our minds again, when we shall know nothing except that which is measured out in rations to be handed to us? Believe this, Lords and Commons: those who advise you to this kind of suppressing may just as well be inviting you to suppress yourselves – and I will soon show how. If you want to know the immediate cause of all this free writing and free speaking, there is not a truer cause that can be pointed to than your own gracious, free, and humane government. It is the freedom, Lords and Commons, that your own courageous and helpful guidance has bought us, freedom which nourishes all great minds. It is this that has elevated and enlightened our spirits like the influence of heaven; it is this that has liberated, enlarged, and lifted up our knowledge and

understanding, to levels far above what it once was.

Ye cannot make us now less capable, less knowing, less eagerly pursuing of the truth, unless ye first make yourselves, that made us so, less the lovers, less the founders of our true liberty. We can grow ignorant again, brutish, formal and slavish, as ye found us; but you then must first become that which ye cannot be, oppressive, arbitrary and tyrannous, as they were from whom ye have freed us. That our hearts are now more capricious, our thoughts more erected to the search and expectation of greatest and exactest things, is the issue of your own virtue propagated in us; ye cannot suppress that, unless ye reinforce an abrogated and merciless law, that fathers may dispatch at will their own children. And who shall then stick closest to ye, and excite others? not he who takes up arms for cote and conduct, and his four nobles of Danegelt. Although I dispraise not the defence of just immunities, yet love my peace better, if that were all. Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.

What would be best advised, then, if it be found so hurtful and so unequal to suppress opinions for the newness or the unsuitableness to a customary

You cannot make us now less capable, less knowledgeable, less eager to look for the truth, unless you first make yourselves – the very ones who made us this way – less the lovers and founders of our true freedom. We can grow ignorant again, uncivilised, ordinary, and submissive, as you found us. But then you must first become something that you cannot be: oppressive, illiberal, unrestrained, and tyrannous, just like those from whom you have freed us. Our hearts are now more changeable, our thoughts more built and organised to searching for and expecting the greatest and best developed things. And that is the offspring of your own virtue, carried on in us. You cannot suppress that, unless you re-establish and re-enforce an abolished and merciless Roman law, that allowed fathers to kill their own children at will. And who will then stick closest by you, and inspire others to your support? Not those who previously took up arms with you against the illegal taxes forced on us by the king. I do not condemn fighting for rights and deserved freedoms, but I love peace better, personally, if that could be the way. Above all other liberties, give me the freedom to know, to speak, and to argue openly and honestly according to my conscience.

It will not be my task here to say what would be the best advice going forward, if it is agreed that it is so harmful and unfair to suppress opinions for

acceptance, will not be my task to say. I only shall repeat what I have learned from one of your own honourable number, a right noble and pious lord, who, had he not sacrificed his life and fortunes to the Church and Commonwealth, we had not now missed and bewailed a worthy and undoubted patron of this argument. Ye know him, I am sure; yet I for honour's sake, and may it be eternal to him, shall name him, the Lord Brook. He writing of episcopacy, and by the way treating of sects and schisms, left ye his vote, or rather now the last words of his dying charge, which I know will ever be of dear and honoured regard with ye, so full of meekness and breathing charity, that next to his last testament, who bequeathed love and peace to his disciples, I cannot call to mind where I have read or heard words more mild and peaceful. He there exhorts us to hear with patience and humility those, however they be miscalled, that desire to live purely, in such a use of God's ordinances, as the best guidance of their conscience gives them, and to tolerate them, though in some disconformity to ourselves. The book itself will tell us more at large, being published to the world, and dedicated to the Parliament by him who, both for his life and for his death, deserves that what advice he left be not laid by without perusal.

being new, or unsuitable and unacceptable to custom and tradition. I shall only repeat what I have learned from a member of your own honourable ranks, an utterly noble and religious Lord. Had he not sacrificed his life and fortunes fighting for the Parliamentary cause against the king, we would not now be missing and mourning a worthy and guaranteed supporter of this argument. You know him, I am sure, but for honour's sake (and may honour be eternally his) I shall name him: Robert Greville, the Lord Brook. He left you his vote on this issue by writing about the rule of bishops, and how to deal with division and sects. Or rather now it is his dying appeal, which I know will always be regarded dearly and with honour by yourselves, as it is so full of patience and gentleness, and breathing compassion. Other than the final words and wishes of the one who left behind love and peace to his disciples, I cannot call to mind where I have read or heard words more mild and peaceful. There he urges us to listen with patience and humility to those, no matter how they are labelled, who wish to live purely by following God's commands using the best guidance that their conscience gives them, and to tolerate them, even though they do not match with ourselves. The book itself will tell us more in greater detail, as it is a work published to the world, and dedicated to the Parliament by its author, who, both for his life and for his death, deserves that what advice he left should not be put aside without being read.

And now the time in special is, by privilege to write and speak what may help to the further discussing of matters in agitation. The temple of Janus with his two controversial faces might now not insignificantly be set open. And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing. 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, framed and fabricked already to our hands. Yet when the new light which we beg for shines in upon us, there be who envy and oppose, if it come not first in at their casements. What a collusion is this, whenas we are exhorted by the wise man to use diligence, to seek for wisdom as for hidden treasures early and late, that another order shall enjoin us to know nothing but by statute? When a man hath been labouring the hardest labour in the deep mines of knowledge, hath furnished out his findings in all their equipage: drawn forth his reasons as it were a battle ranged: scattered and defeated all objections in his way; calls out his adversary into the plain, offers him the advantage of wind and sun, if he please, only that he may try the matter by dint of argument: for his opponents then to skulk, to lay ambushments, to keep a narrow bridge of licensing where the challenger should pass, though it be valour enough in soldiership, is but weakness and cowardice in the wars of Truth.

Now is the time, especially so, for using our right and privilege to speak and write anything that may help discuss any issues that are debated. The temple of Janus, with his two faces set in opposite directions, might now, significantly, be kept open, as the Romans did during times of war. And even if all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, Truth is in the field, and we do wrong to doubt its strength by licensing, censoring, and banning. Let Truth and Falsehood grapple – who ever knew Truth to come off worse in a free and open encounter? Being proven wrong by Truth is the best and most reliable suppression. No-one who hears the praying that there is for light and clearer knowledge to be sent down to us would be satisfied with dwelling only on the discipline of Presbyterianism, finished and framed already for us, but would think of other matters to be settled. But when the new light that we beg for shines down upon us, there are those who are jealous and oppose it if it does not shine first through their windows. What kind of conspiracy is this, when we are implored by the wise man, Solomon, to search night and day for knowledge and wisdom as if searching for hidden treasure, while another order will instruct us to know nothing except things that are first approved by the law? Imagine someone has been performing the hardest labour in the deep mines of knowledge, has fully equipped all the findings, has set out their reasoning as if an army arranged for battle, has scattered and defeated all objections in the way thus far, and calls out their opponents into the field, giving them the advantage of wind and sun, if desired, all so

For who knows not that Truth is strong, next to the Almighty? She needs no policies, nor stratagems, nor licensings to make her victorious; those are the shifts and the defences that error uses against her power. Give her but room, and do not bind her when she sleeps, for then she speaks not true, as the old Proteus did, who spake oracles only when he was caught and bound, but then rather she turns herself into all shapes, except her own, and perhaps tunes her voice according to the time, as Micaiah did before Ahab, until she be adjured into her own likeness. Yet is it not impossible that she may have more shapes than one. What else is all that rank of things indifferent, wherein Truth may be on this side or on the other, without being unlike herself? What but a vain shadow else is the abolition of those ordinances, that handwriting nailed to the cross? What great purchase is this Christian liberty which Paul so often boasts of? His doctrine is, that he who eats or eats not, regards a day or regards it not, may do either to the Lord. How many other things might be tolerated in peace, and left to conscience, had we but charity, and were it not the chief stronghold of our hypocrisy to be ever judging one another?

that their conclusions may be tested through argument. If the opponents then sneak around to lay traps for ambush, and keep a narrow bridge of censorship where the challenger wishes to pass, while that is all courageous enough in real battle, it is only weakness and cowardice in the wars of Truth.

For who does not know that Truth is stronger than all, except the Almighty? It needs no policies, strategies, or licensings to be victorious – those things are the evasions and defences that error uses against Truth's power. Just give it room, and do not bind it when it sleeps, for that it is when it does not speak honestly and accurately. While old Proteus, the Old Man of the Sea, would only speak truthfully about the future when he was caught and bound, changing his shape to avoid it, Truth changes its shape when caught and bound, taking all forms but its own, perhaps tuning its voice to match the time (like Micaiah when in front of Ahab) until it can be commanded under oath back into its true form. Yet it is not impossible that Truth may have more than one shape. How else would one explain all those subjective things, neither good nor bad, in which Truth can be on this side or that, without contradicting itself? We were saved as the handwriting of laws against us was erased, taken with our Saviour to his cross. Yet if Truth is not free and unbound, what could this act be but an empty shadow? What kind of great purchase is this Christian freedom that Paul so often boasts of? Paul's doctrine is that whether one eats or fasts, whether one puts importance on certain days or

sees them all equally, it does not matter to the Lord. How many other things might be tolerated in peace and left to conscience, if only we were more compassionate and patient, and if it was not our central, best defended hypocrisy to be forever judging one another?

I fear yet this iron yoke of outward conformity hath left a slavish print upon our necks; the ghost of a linen decency yet haunts us. We stumble and are impatient at the least dividing of one visible congregation from another, though it be not in fundamentals; and through our forwardness to suppress, and our backwardness to recover any enthralled piece of truth out of the gripe of custom, we care not to keep truth separated from truth, which is the fiercest rent and disunion of all. We do not see that, while we still affect by all means a rigid external formality, we may as soon fall again into a gross conforming stupidity, a stark and dead congealment of wood and hay and stubble, forced and frozen together, which is more to the sudden degenerating of a Church than many subdichotomies of petty schisms.

Not that I can think well of every light separation, or that all in a Church is to be expected gold and silver and precious stones: it is not possible for man to sever the wheat from the tares, the good fish from the other fry; that must be the Angels' ministry at the end of mortal things. Yet if all cannot be of one mind – as

I still fear this iron collar of outward agreement has left a print of slavery upon our necks; the ghost of priestly robes and proper decency still haunts us. At the smallest dividing of one visible group from another we stumble and become impatient, when it is not even a disagreement in anything fundamental. And because of our willingness to suppress, and our unwillingness to recover any enslaved piece of truth out of the clutches of tradition, we do not care if we keep truth separated from truth, which is the most dangerous split and separation of all. We do not see that, while we still give, by all means, an outward and uniform appearance that is strong and rigid, we may quickly fall again into a great multitude conforming in stupidity, a rigid and dead congealed mass of wood and hay and straw, forced and frozen together: something more likely to cause the sudden degeneration of a Church than many subdivisions of small and trivial disagreements.

Not that I can approve of every little separation, nor should anyone expect everything in a Church to be gold and silver and precious stones. It is not possible for us to pull the wheat apart from the wheat-like weeds, the good fish from the rest of the catch – that must be the good work of the

who looks they should be? – this doubtless is more wholesome, more prudent, and more Christian, that many be tolerated, rather than all compelled. I mean not tolerated popery, and open superstition, which, as it extirpates all religions and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate, provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and regain the weak and the misled: that also which is impious or evil absolutely either against faith or manners no law can possibly permit, that intends not to unlaw itself: but those neighbouring differences, or rather indifferences, are what I speak of, whether in some point of doctrine or of discipline, which, though they may be many, yet need not interrupt “the unity of spirit”, if we could but find among us “the bond of peace”.

In the meanwhile if any one would write, and bring his helpful hand to the slow-moving Reformation which we labour under, if Truth have spoken to him before others, or but seemed at least to speak, who hath so bejesuited us that we should trouble that man with asking license to do so worthy a deed? and not consider this, that if it come to prohibiting, there is not aught more likely to be prohibited than truth itself; whose first appearance to our eyes, bleared and dimmed with prejudice and custom, is more unsightly and unplausible than many errors, even as the person

angels at the end of mortal things. But if all minds cannot be the same (and who thinks that they should be?), it is undoubtedly healthier, more far-sighted, and more Christian, if many are tolerated, rather than all compelled. I do not mean that theocracy and open hostility to science and reason should be tolerated. It destroys all religious and civil rights and independence, and so should be destroyed itself, as long as all compassionate and understanding methods have first been used to win back the weak and the misguided. Also, no law can possibly allow that which is immoral or evil, absolutely against social conduct or morality, unless that law intends to make itself unacceptable. It is those neighbourly differences (or indifferences), that clash but do not prevent and forbid each other, that I speak of, whether they are about some point of teaching and belief or of practice and action. And, though there may be many of them, they do not need to interrupt the unity of spirit, if we could just find the bond of peace among us.

Meanwhile, if anyone who has had Truth speak to them first – or, at least, believes that they have – seeks to write and bring their helpful hand to the slow-moving Reformation that we work for, who has made us into such priestly opposers of progress that we would demand that this person request permission to do such a worthy deed? Will we not consider that there is nothing more likely to be censored and prohibited than truth itself? When we first lay eyes on truth, our eyes are bleary and dimmed with prejudice and custom,

is of many a great man slight and contemptible to see to. And what do they tell us vainly of new opinions, when this very opinion of theirs, that none must be heard but whom they like, is the worst and newest opinion of all others; and is the chief cause why sects and schisms do so much abound, and true knowledge is kept at distance from us; besides yet a greater danger which is in it.

For when God shakes a kingdom with strong and healthful commotions to a general reforming, 'tis not untrue that many sectaries and false teachers are then busiest in seducing; but yet more true it is, that God then raises to his own work men of rare abilities, and more than common industry, not only to look back and revise what hath been taught heretofore, but to gain further and go on some new enlightened steps in the discovery of truth. For such is the order of God's enlightening his Church, to dispense and deal out by degrees his beam, so as our earthly eyes may best sustain it.

Neither is God appointed and confined, 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 ourselves 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 Chapel at Westminster; when all the faith and religion that

making truth appear uglier and less plausible than many actual errors, just as many a great thinker can be seen as unimportant, disrespectful, and despicable. We are warned of new opinions, to no avail, when it is this opinion of theirs that is the newest and the worst of all: the opinion that only that which they like may be heard. It is this attitude that is the chief cause of thriving division and conflict, and keeps true knowledge distant from us. And, besides this, there is yet a greater danger within it.

For when God shakes a kingdom to reform things generally, with strong turbulence good for its health, it is true that many false teachers and their followers are busiest in seducing at that exact time. But it is still more true that God raises people of rare abilities and extraordinary dedication to do his work at that moment, not only to look back on and revise what has been taught so far, but to gain further knowledge, and go on some new enlightened steps in the discovery of truth. For this is how God enlightens his Church, by dispensing and dealing out his light bit by bit, so that it is possible for our earthly eyes to tolerate it.

Neither is God assigned to certain times and places, limited in when and where his chosen ones will first be heard to speak, for he does not see as we see, he does not choose as we choose. If we forget this, we would devote ourselves again to fixed places, gatherings, and public meetings, planting our faith where the clergy meet to decide on doctrine and where we worship in the Chapel at

shall be there canonized is not sufficient without plain convincement, and the charity of patient instruction to supple the least bruise of conscience, to edify the meanest Christian, who desires to walk in the Spirit, and not in the letter of human trust, for all the number of voices that can be there made; no, though Harry VII himself there, with all his liege tombs about him, should lend them voices from the dead, to swell their number.

And if the men be erroneous who appear to be the leading schismatics, what withholds us but our sloth, our self-will, and distrust in the right cause, that we do not give them gentle meetings and gentle dismissions, that we debate not and examine the matter thoroughly with liberal and frequent audience; if not for their sakes, yet for our own? seeing no man who hath tasted learning, but will confess the many ways of profiting by those who, not contented with stale receipts, are able to manage and set forth new positions to the world. And were they but as the dust and cinders of our feet, so long as in that notion they may yet serve to polish and brighten the armour of Truth, even for that respect they were not utterly to be cast away. But if they be of those whom God hath fitted for the special use of these times with eminent and ample gifts, and those perhaps neither among the priests nor among the Pharisees, and we in the haste of a precipitant zeal shall make no distinction, but resolve to stop their mouths, because we fear they

Westminster, when all the faith and religion that these places hold and give authority to is not enough without simply convincing others. It is insufficient without the offer of patient guidance to listen to and ease every problem raised by another's conscience, and to educate even the most lowly and ordinary Christian who wishes to walk in the Spirit, and not in blind trust of human instruction, despite all the many voices that can be heard for that. No, not even if Henry the 7<sup>th</sup>, laying at rest beneath Westminster Chapel with his allies buried all around him, were to speak up and lend the voices of the dead to increase their number.

And if the ones who appear to be leading the dissent are wrong, just what, besides our laziness, our lack of self-discipline, and our lack of trust in what is right, is stopping us from giving them thoughtful attention and good-natured dismissal? Why would we not debate and examine the issue thoroughly, frequently, and in open-minded discussion – if not for their sake, but for our own? We see that all who have tasted learning admit that there are many ways to benefit by listening to those who have discovered and figured out new positions and laid them out for the world, having been unsatisfied with the old and unexciting thinking handed to them. And if they were nothing but dust and ash beneath our feet, as long as in being so they serve to polish and brighten the armour of Truth, just for that they ought to not be completely thrown away. But they may be those who have been equipped by God for special use in these times, given plenty of great gifts but are

come with new and dangerous opinions, as we commonly forejudge them ere we understand them; no less than woe to us, while, thinking thus to defend the Gospel, we are found the persecutors.

There have been not a few since the beginning of this Parliament, both of the presbytery and others, who by their unlicensed books, to the contempt of an Imprimatur, first broke that triple ice clung about our hearts, and taught the people to see day: I hope that none of those were the persuaders to renew upon us this bondage which they themselves have wrought so much good by contemning. But if neither the check that Moses gave to young Joshua, nor the countermand which our Saviour gave to young John, who was so ready to prohibit those whom he thought unlicensed, be not enough to admonish our elders how unacceptable to God their testy mood of prohibiting is; if neither their own remembrance what evil hath abounded in the Church by this let of licensing, and what good they themselves have begun by transgressing it, be not enough, but that they will persuade and execute the most Dominican part of the Inquisition over us, and are already with one foot in the stirrup so active at suppressing, it would be no unequal distribution in the first place to suppress the suppressors themselves: whom the change of their condition hath puffed up, more than their late experience of harder times hath made wise.

perhaps not part of the clergy or the established authorities for thought, and in our urgency from our passion that drives us we do not make any distinctions, but decide to shut them up, because we fear that they come with new and dangerous opinions, as we so often prejudge them before we understand them. Nothing less than great sorrow will be ours, when while we think we are defending the truth, we turn out to be the oppressors.

Since the beginning of this Parliament, there have been more than a few, both within the Church and without, who first broke the ice layered about our hearts with their own unlicensed books, defying any stamp of approval, and taught people to see daylight. I hope that none of those were the ones to argue that these shackles should be renewed upon us, when they themselves gained so much by throwing them off. The fact that Moses refused to prevent prophesy from being preached when Joshua asked him to forbid it, nor the fact that Christ overruled and admonished young John when he told our Saviour how he had suppressed the speech of one who was casting out devils because they were not a disciple, may not be enough to warn our elders how unacceptable to God their impatient mood of banning things is. Their own memory of the evil that has thrived in the Church due to this barrier of censorship, and the good that they themselves have kickstarted by breaching it, may not be enough to stop them from putting into law and into practice the very heart of the Spanish Inquisition over us, being already so active in suppressing with only one foot in the stirrups. If so,

And as for regulating the press, let no man think to have the honour of advising ye better than yourselves have done in that Order published next before this, “that no book be printed, unless the printer’s and the author’s name, or at least the printer’s, be registered.” Those which otherwise come forth, if they be found mischievous and libellous, the fire and the executioner will be the timeliest and the most effectual remedy that man’s prevention can use. For this authentic Spanish policy of licensing books, if I have said aught, will prove the most unlicensed book itself within a short while; and was the immediate image of a Star Chamber decree to that purpose made in those very times when that Court did the rest of those her pious works, for which she is now fallen from the stars with Lucifer. Whereby ye may guess what kind of state prudence, what love of the people, what care of religion or good manners there was at the contriving, although with singular hypocrisy it pretended to bind books to their good behaviour. And how it got the upper hand of your precedent Order so well constituted before, if we may believe those men whose profession gives them cause to inquire most, it may be doubted there was in it the fraud of some old patentees and monopolizers in the trade of bookselling; who under pretence of the poor in their Company not to be defrauded, and the just retaining of each man his several copy, which God forbid should

then it would not be unfair action to first suppress the suppressors themselves, who have become puffed up with pride by their change in position and condition, rather than being made wiser by their recent experience of harder times.

And as for regulation of the press, let no-one think they have the honour of advising you better than you have advised yourselves in the Order published prior to this one, in which you say that no book should be printed unless it states the names of the author and the printer – or at least the printer’s. For works that appear without this and are found to be slander made for defaming others, destruction after publication will be the most appropriate and most effective solution that can be used as prevention. Because this authentically Spanish policy of licensing books, if I have shown anything at all, will prove to be the most unlicensed book itself within a short while, and it appears identical to a decree by the Star Chamber calling for the suppression of undesired publications, which was made when that royal court performed the rest of its holy deeds – for which it has now fallen from the stars with Lucifer. You may guess from that what kind of state judgement, what love of the people, from what care for religion and good manners it was created, while it pretended, with exceptional hypocrisy, to force books to behave. How has this now managed to get the upper hand against your previous Order, which I have already praised for being better formulated? If we may believe those who, given their profession, have looked into it most, we can

be gainsaid, brought divers glossing colours to the House, which were indeed but colours, and serving to no end except it be to exercise a superiority over their neighbours; men who do not therefore labour in an honest profession to which learning is indebted, that they should be made other men's vassals. Another end is thought was aimed at by some of them in procuring by petition this Order, that, having power in their hands, malignant books might the easier scape abroad, as the event shows.

But of these sophisms and elenchs of merchandise I skill not. This I know, that errors in a good government and in a bad are equally almost incident; for what magistrate may not be misinformed, and much the sooner, if liberty of printing be reduced into the power of a few? But to redress willingly and speedily what hath been erred, and in highest authority to esteem a plain advertisement more than others have done a sumptuous bride, is a virtue (honoured Lords and Commons) answerable to your highest actions, and whereof none can participate but greatest and wisest men.

suspect that it involved the lies of some old traders in books, who had patents and monopolies to protect. People who pretended to be concerned about the poor in their company being exposed to fraud, and who hid behind the rights of everyone to maintain copyright on their work – and God forbid that should ever be rejected – and through this presented diverse and colourful arguments to you. And colourful they were – only, merely there to colour the truth and to gain superiority for some over their neighbours. These are people, therefore, who do not work at anything honest, or anything that learning could be grateful for, and so they should be regarded as beneath others. It is thought there was another goal in mind for some when petitioning Parliament to take the kind of control over the press that the Star Chamber had, and that was so that, having that power in their hands, Royalist books against Parliament could escape abroad more easily to seek support – which we saw happen.

But I am not skilled in arguments and debunking that are clever but false, these tricks of the trade. This I do know: that mistakes are almost equally likely to happen in a good government and in a bad one. For what member of government is not at risk of being misinformed, and even more so if the freedom of the press is to be reduced into the power of a few? But to set right, quickly and willingly, what has been done wrong, and to then announce that correction, with highest authority, more clearly and publicly than some have announced their engagement, is a virtue,

Areopagitica

Free Speech Upon the Rock Above the City

honoured Lords and Commons, possessed by you  
in your finest moments, and something in which  
only the greatest and the wisest can participate.