John Milton

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With the popularity of the royalist tract Eikon Basilike after the execution of Charles I, the new Puritan government needed to find someone to defend its cause against the growing support for the King. The Puritans found their man in the newly appointed Secretary for Foreign Tongues to the Council of State, John Milton. In Eikonoklastes ("Image Breaker"), Milton focused his attack on the arguments of Eikon Basilike more than on its authorship. He doubted whether the King wrote his own defense, but he chose to concentrate on a chapter-by-chapter refutation of the book's account of history—in terms of both events and the perspective on them. Milton also revealed that one the prayers attributed to the King was really Pamela's prayer from Sir Philip Sidney's prose romance Arcadia. For the Puritan Milton this was a shocking piece of paganism and plagiarism by one who presented himself as pious. Milton's language in Eikonoklastes is iconoclastic—mocking and sarcastic, marked by invective and sharply stinging ad hominem argument. One royalist called Eikonoklastes a "blackguardly book" in which Milton "blows his viper's breath upon those immortal devotions." Some royalists even viewed Milton's blindness as God's punishment for his having attacked the King. Shortly after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the House of Commons ordered the burning of Eikonoklastes and had Milton arrested. He was imprisoned for several months before being released through the aid of his friend Andrew Marvell. Eikonklastes was first published in October 1649; the second and final edition in Milton's lifetime appeared in 1650.

For more about Milton, see his principal listing, page 1698.

from Eikonoklastes from Chapter 1. Upon the King's Calling This Last Parliament

"The odium and offenses which some men's rigor, or remissness in church and state had contracted upon his government, he resolved to have expiated with better laws and regulations." And yet the worst of misdemeanors committed by the worst of all his favorites, in the height of their dominion, whether acts of rigor or remissness, he hath from time to time continued, owned, and taken upon himself by public declarations, as often as the clergy, or any other of his instruments felt themselves overburdened with the people's hatred. And who knows not the superstitious rigor of his Sunday's chapel, and the licentious remissness of his Sunday's theater; accompanied with that reverend statute for dominical jigs and maypoles, published in his own name, and derived from the example of his father James? Which testifies all that rigor in superstition, all that remissness in religion to have issued out originally from his own house, and from his own authority.

Much rather then may those general miscarriages in State, his proper sphere, be imputed to no other person chiefly than to himself. And which of all those oppressive

and mixed dancing" on Sundays

acts, or impositions did he ment hung ominously over of his evil government upon much too late, what wonde a work wherein all his und judgment. Neither could h so spiritual. Which may we him; either some politic for persecution to all those the

The like amendment h conscience told him was fit and not suffered his own ju things one was the Earl of still his resolution was the that all Britain was to be ti one man; as if those gifts ! him with his fortune to be a tyrant, but professes to l ment, though never so con for any Parliament or the science, by this rule was a easy for him to call by any knowledged to have no rig law in a free nation hath t which he denying to enac terposing his own private and specious promises, m most mortified retirement different from his former both the nations of this is his restorement, is obviou

And this is the substa eled into the form of a primatter or the manner, mother as good Manuals, a liturgist, clapped together as little need of Christiar ordinary and salable piec such a kind of psalmistr

^{1.} While observers such as the Spanish ambassador noted Charles's sincere piety, Milton considered traditional ritual "superstitious," ironically linking it to irreligious theater life. Like the Purimas, Milton abhorred Sunday theater performances, and in Of Reformation, he attacked the bishops for promoting "gaming, jigging, wassailing,

The Book of Sports (1633) forbade bearbaiting and bullbaiting on Sundays, but also rebuked the Purituns for condemning other forms of recreation such as dancing and archery.

^{3.} Thomas Wentworth, Earl of St in May 1641. Charles had recall Lord Deputyship in Ireland to help the Scots Covenanters. Parliamen of planning to use the Irish army opponents in Scotland and Englan ford was successfully defended

acts, or impositions did he ever disclaim or disavow, till the fatal awe of this Parliament hung ominously over him. Yet here he smoothly seeks to wipe off all the envy of his evil government upon his substitutes, and under-officers: and promises, though much too late, what wonders he purposed to have done in the reforming of religion—a work wherein all his undertakings heretofore declare him to have had little or no judgment. Neither could his breeding, or his course of life acquaint him with a thing so spiritual. Which may well assure us what kind of reformation we could expect from him; either some politic form of an imposed religion, or else perpetual vexation, and persecution to all those that complied not with such a form.

The like amendment he promises in State; not a step further "than his reason and conscience told him was fit to be desired"; wishing "he had kept within those bounds, and not suffered his own judgment to have been overborne in some things," of which things one was the Earl of Strafford's execution.3 And what signifies all this, but that still his resolution was the same, to set up an arbitrary government of his own; and that all Britain was to be tied and chained to the conscience, judgment, and reason of one man; as if those gifts had been only his peculiar and prerogative, entailed upon him with his fortune to be a king? When as doubtless no man so obstinate, or so much a tyrant, but professes to be guided by that which he calls his reason, and his judgment, though never so corrupted; and pretends also his conscience. In the meanwhile, for any Parliament or the whole nation to have either reason, judgment, or conscience, by this rule was altogether in vain, if it thwarted the king's will; which was easy for him to call by any other more plausible name. He himself hath many times acknowledged to have no right over us but by law; and by the same law to govern us: but law in a free nation hath been ever public reason, the enacted reason of a Parliament; which he denying to enact, denies to govern us by that which ought to be our law; interposing his own private reason, which to us is no law. And thus we find these fair and specious promises, made upon the experience of many hard sufferings, and his most mortified retirements, being thoroughly sifted, to contain nothing in them much different from his former practices, so cross, and so averse to all his Parliaments, and both the nations of this island. What fruits they could in likelihood have produced in his restorement, is obvious to any prudent foresight.

And this is the substance of his first section, till we come to the devout of it, modeled into the form of a private psalter. Which they who so much admire, either for the matter or the manner, may as well admire the archbishop's late breviary, and many other as good Manuals, and Handmaids of Devotion, the lip-work of every prelatical liturgist, clapped together, and quilted out of Scripture phrase, with as much ease, and as little need of Christian diligence, or judgment, as belongs to the compiling of any ordinary and salable piece of English divinity, that the shops value. But he who from such a kind of psalmistry, or any other verbal devotion, without the pledge and

^{3.} Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, was executed in May 1641. Charles had recalled Strafford from the Lord Deputyship in Ireland to help with the war against the Scots Covenanters. Parliament accused Wentworth of planning to use the Irish army to suppress the King's opponents in Scotland and England. Even though Strafford was successfully defended against the charges,

Charles signed his death warrant, fearing retuliation against himself and the Queen for their part in a plot to rescue Strafford.

Milton's name for Archbishop Laud's Prayer Book, which the Puritans hated because of its similarity to Roman Catholic ritual.

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earnest of suitable deeds, can be persuaded of a zeal, and true righteousness in the person, hath much yet to learn; and knows not that the deepest policy of a tyrant hath been ever to counterfeit religious. And Aristotle in his Politics, hath mentioned that special craft among twelve other tyrannical sophisms. Neither want we examples. Andronicus Comnenus the Byzantine Emperor, though a most cruel tyrant, is reported by Nicetas to have been a constant reader of Saint Paul's Epistles; and by continual study had so incorporated the phrase and style of that transcendent apostle into all his familiar letters, that the imitation seemed to vie with the original. Yet this availed not to deceive the people of that empire; who notwithstanding his saint's vizard, tore him to pieces for his tyranny.

From stories of this nature both ancient and modern which abound, the poets also, and some English, have been in this point so mindful of decorum, as to put never more pious words in the mouth of any person, than of a tyrant. I shall not instance an abstruse author, wherein the King might be less conversant, but one whom we well know was the closet companion of these his solitudes, William Shakespeare, who introduces the person of Richard the Third, speaking in as high a strain of piety, and mortification, as is uttered in any passage of this book, and sometimes to the same sense and purpose with some words in this place, "I intended," saith he, "not only to oblige my friends but mine enemies." The like saith Richard, Act 2. Scene 1,

I do not know that Englishman alive With whom my soul is any jot at odds, More than the infant that is born tonight; I thank my God for my humility.

Other stuff of this sort may be read throughout the whole tragedy, wherein the poet used not much license in departing from the truth of history, which delivers him a deep dissembler, not of his affections only, but of religion.

from Chapter 4. Upon the Insolency of the Tumults

And that the King was so emphatical and elaborate on this theme against tumults, and expressed with such a vehemence his hatred of them, will redound less perhaps, than he was aware, to the commendation of his government. For besides that in good governments they happen seldomest, and rise not without cause, if they prove extreme and pernicious, they were never counted so to monarchy, but to monarchical tyranny; and extremes one with another are at most antipathy. If then the King so extremely stood in fear of tumults, the inference will endanger him to be the other extreme. Thus far the occasion of this discourse against tumults; now to the discourse itself, voluble enough, and full of sentence, but that, for the most part, either specious rather than solid, or to his cause nothing pertinent.

"He never thought any thing more to presage the mischiefs that ensued, than those tumults." Then was his foresight but short, and much mistaken. Those tumults were but the mild effects of an evil and injurious reign; not signs of mischiefs to come, but seeking relief for mischiefs past; those signs were to be read more apparent in his

against his lawless governm pleasure against a nation the bounds of law & reverence tyrannous King, whose prougar; the sad cries and oppreplicating people they did not the Parliament against who That "they invaded the

rage and purposed revenge

That "they invaded the accusation, not seconded by best able to complain. And more relation to the Court people. But if their petition entrance into the House of then was the honor, and fre

"They forbore not rude and his Court."

It was more wonder, I against the city, and his whetheir rage have handled tyre

"They were not a short it, who most felt it; for the scription "worse than a stor worse fears, terrors, and en tude of his subjects, armed joints with such a terrible a of bad intentions from hir "men scare themselves an them a kind of armor, and of a wise fear and suspicion

He goes on therefore mults. "They first petitional liament. They removed observed a man of iron of Justice, who with his iroceitful forms and circumst send it down, whether by a

"But they subdued th seditious and schismatical

Now we may perceiv King's grace or princely go out of their baronies, out of

^{5.} See Aristotle, *Politics* 5.9.15, for the notion that care in religious ritual is a device of tyrants.

^{6.} A 12th-century historian who recorded the cruelty of Commenus's reign (1183-1185).

^{1.} Significance, meaning.

In Of Reformation, Milton com Anglican bishops to that of Belshe Babylon on the eve of the fall of it and Persians. When King Belshazzz writing on the wall that foretold his his loins were loosed, and his kne

rage and purposed revenge of those free expostulations, and clamors of the people against his lawless government. "Not any thing," saith he, "portends more God's displeasure against a nation than when he suffers the clamors of the vulgar to pass all bounds of law & reverence to authority." It portends rather his displeasure against a tyrannous King, whose proud throne he intends to overturn by that contemptible vulgar; the sad cries and oppressions of whom his royalty regarded not. As for that supplicating people they did no hurt either to law or authority, but stood for it rather in the Parliament against whom they feared would violate it.

That "they invaded the honor and freedom of the two Houses," is his own officious accusation, not seconded by the Parliament, who had they seen cause, were themselves best able to complain. And if they "shook & menaced" any, they were such as had more relation to the Court, than to the Commonwealth; enemies, not patrons of the people. But if their petitioning unarmed were an invasion of both Houses, what was his entrance into the House of Commons, besetting it with armed men, in what condition

then was the honor, and freedom of that House?

"They forbore not rude deportments, contemptuous words and actions to himself and his Court."

It was more wonder, having heard what treacherous hostility he had designed against the city, and his whole kingdom, that they forbore to handle him as people in

their rage have handled tyrants heretofore for less offenses.

"They were not a short ague, but a fierce quotidian fever:" He indeed may best say it, who most felt it; for the shaking was within him; and it shook him by his own description "worse than a storm, worse then an earthquake, Belshazzar's Palsy." Had not worse fears, terrors, and envies made within him that commotion, how could a multitude of his subjects, armed with no other weapon then petitions, have shaken all his joints with such a terrible ague. Yet that the Parliament should entertain the least fear of bad intentions from him or his party, he endures not; but would persuade us that "men scare themselves and others without cause;" for he thought fear would be to them a kind of armor, and his design was, if it were possible, to disarm all, especially of a wise fear and suspicion; for that he knew would find weapons.

He goes on therefore with vehemence to repeat the mischiefs done by these tumults. "They first petitioned, then protected, dictate next, and lastly overawe the Parliament. They removed obstructions, they purged the Houses, cast out rotten members." If there were a man of iron, such as Talus, by our poet Spenser, is feigned to be the page of Justice, who with his iron flail could do all this, and expeditiously, without those deceitful forms and circumstances of law, worse than ceremonies in religion; I say God

send it down, whether by one Talus, or by a thousand.3

"But they subdued the men of conscience in Parliament, backed and abetted all seditious and schismatical proposals against government ecclesiastical and civil."

Now we may perceive the root of his hatred whence it springs. It was not the King's grace or princely goodness, but this iron flail the people, that drove the bishops out of their baronies, out of their cathedrals, out of the Lord's house, out of their copes

another" (Daniel 5.6).

^{2.} In Of Reformation, Milton compares the feasting of Anglican bishops to that of Belshazzar in his palace in Babylon on the eve of the fall of the city to the Medes and Persians. When King Belshazzar saw the mysterious writing on the wall that foretold his doom, "the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against

Talus is the iron flail who ruthlessly cuts down all who
oppose Artegal, the Knight of Justice, in Spenser's Faerie
Queene 5, much of which is about the subjugation of Ireland by England.

and surplices, and all those papistical innovations,⁴ threw down the High Commission and Star Chamber, gave us a triennial Parliament, and what we most desired;⁵ in revenge whereof he now so bitterly inveighs against them; these are those seditious and schismatical proposals, then by him condescended to, as acts of grace, now of another name; which declares him, touching matters of Church and State, to have been no other man in the deepest of his solitude, than he was before at the highest of his sovereignty.

But this was not the worst of these tumults, they played the hasty "midwives," and "would not stay the ripening, but went straight to ripping up, and forcibly cut out

abortive votes."

They would not stay perhaps the Spanish demurring, and putting off such wholesome acts and counsels, as the politic cabin at Whitehall had no mind to. But all this is complained here as done to the Parliament, and yet we heard not the Parliament at that time complain of any violence from the people, but from him. Wherefore intrudes he to plead the cause of Parliament against the people, while the Parliament was pleading their own cause against him; and against him were forced to seek refuge of the people? Tis plain then that those confluxes and resorts interrupted not the Parliament, nor by them were thought tumultuous, but by him only and his court faction.

"But what good Man had not rather want any thing he most desired for the public good, than attain it by such unlawful and irreligious means;" as much as to say, had not rather sit still and let his country be tyrannized, than that the people, finding no other remedy, should stand up like men and demand their rights and liberties. This is the artificialest piece of fineness to persuade men into slavery that the wit of court could have invented. But hear how much better the moral of this lesson would befit the teacher. What good man had not rather want a boundless and arbitrary power, and those fine flowers of the crown, called prerogatives, than for them to use force and perpetual vexation to his faithful subjects, nay to wade for them through blood and civil war? So that this and the whole bundle of those following sentences may be applied better to the convincement of his own violent courses, than of those pretended tumults.

"Who were the chief demagogues to send for those tumults, some alive are not ignorant." Setting aside the affrightment of this goblin word; for the King by his leave cannot coin English as he could money, to be current (and tis believed this wording was above his known style and orthography, and accuses the whole composure to be conscious of some other author) yet if the people "were sent for, emboldened and directed" by those "demagogues," who, saving his Greek, were good patriots, and by his own confession "Men of some repute for parts and piety," it helps well to assure us there was both urgent cause, and the less danger of their coming.

"Complaints were made, yet no redress could be obtained." The Parliament also complained of what danger they sat in from another party, and demanded of him a guard, but it was not granted. What marvel then if it cheered them to see some store

of their friends, and in the about them; a defense due due as to their parents; the to them, who were then be and people complained, as at his own doors, by that ce tified and abetted them in the City" may be read. Nowhere blood was first draw was his own blood shed be tice, "In the place where even thine."

From hence he takes

absenting from the Parlia could take place against t and self-undoing declara peached of treason for the and then pulled by the amounted this to "the fea day after his irruption into asperated the people, go i affront, much less violen supplications? Hence ma have justly feared, yet the son, as to dare commit hi had most provoked them robustious manner; Edinl entered England against take so long a journey to terward to the Scotch A stranger, and full of diffi though not in his dealin this his fear of tumults wa from the Parliament, for stances wherein valor is undisciplined rabble," ar mults: if they discover ne slashing at the court gate orderly invading: which

"Some suspected an Whitehall." And they w

^{4.} Milton refers to the London petition calling for the abolition of the bishops' power, introduced Into Parlinment in December 1640, that resulted in their exclusion from the House of Lords.

^{5.} The High Commission, the highest ecclesiastical court, investigated such matters as heresy, recusancy, and any writing against the Book of Common Prayer; Parliament abolished it on 5 July 1641. The Star Chamber was

also abolished because it was viewed as a special tool of government favoring the special right of the sovereign above all other persons and the common law. A triennial Parliament is a parliament convened every three years. 6. Milton believed that Charles I could not have written Eikon Basilike because such passages as this one showed a word choice and style different from Charles's.

The Bishops' Exclusion Bill was to the assertion by 12 bishops that by the House of Lords when the b void.

^{8.} Vestments.

When Charles attempted to form Prayer on the Scottish churc
 The first Scottish war ender

of their friends, and in the Roman not the pettifogging sense, their clients so near about them; a defense due by nature both from whom it was offered, and to whom; as due as to their parents; though the Court stormed, and fretted to see such honor given to them, who were then best fathers of the Commonwealth. And both the Parliament and people complained, and demanded justice for those assaults, if not murders done at his own doors, by that crew of rufflers, but he, instead of doing justice on them, justified and abetted them in what they did, as in his public "Answer to a Petition from the City" may be read. Neither is it slightly to be passed over, that in the very place where blood was first drawn in this cause, as the beginning of all that followed, there was his own blood shed by the executioner. According to that sentence of divine justice, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

From hence he takes occasion to excuse that improvident and fatal error of his absenting from the Parliament. "When he found that no declaration of the bishops could take place against those tumults." Was that worth his considering, that foolish and self-undoing declaration of twelve cypher bishops, who were immediately appeached of treason for that audacious declaring? The bishops peradventure were now and then pulled by the rochets,8 and deserved another kind of pulling; but what amounted this to "the fear of his own person in the streets"? Did he not the very next day after his irruption into the House of Commons, than which nothing had more exasperated the people, go in his coach unguarded into the city? did he receive the least affront, much less violence in any of the streets, but rather humble demeanors, and supplications? Hence may be gathered, that however in his own guiltiness he might have justly feared, yet that he knew the people so full of awe and reverence to his person, as to dare commit himself single among the thickest of them, at a time when he had most provoked them. Besides in Scotland they had handled the Bishops in a more robustious manner; Edinburgh had been full of tumults,9 two armies from thence had entered England against him;1 yet after all this, he was not fearful, but very forward to take so long a journey to Edinburgh;2 which argues first, as did also his rendition afterward to the Scotch Army,3 that to England he continued still, as he was indeed, a stranger, and full of diffidence; to the Scots only a native King,4 in his confidence, though not in his dealing towards them. It shows us next beyond doubting, that all this his fear of tumults was but a mere color and occasion taken of his resolved absence from the Parliament, for some other end not difficult to be guessed. And those instances wherein valor is not to be questioned for not "scuffling with the sea, or an undisciplined rabble," are but subservient to carry on the solemn jest of his fearing tumults: if they discover not withall, the true reason why he departed; only to turn his slashing at the court gate, to slaughtering "in the field"; his disorderly bickering, to an orderly invading: which was nothing else but a more orderly disorder.

"Some suspected and affirmed, that he meditated a War when he went first from Whitehall." And they were not the worst heads that did so, nor did "any of his former

^{7.} The Bishops' Exclusion Bill was Parliament's reaction to the assertion by 12 bishops that any legislation passed by the House of Lords when the bishops were absent was void.

^{8.} Vestments.

When Charles attempted to force the Book of Common Prayer on the Scottish churches, the people rioted.
 The first Scottish war ended with the Treaty of

Berwick in June 1639, the second with the Treaty of Ripon in October 1640.

^{2.} Charles went to Edinburgh in 1641, hoping to pit the Covenanters against their opponents.

Charles surrendered himself to the Scottish army commanders in May 1646.

^{4.} Charles was born in Scotland, and he made special appeals to the Scots to be their king in both 1641 and 1646.

acts weaken him" to that, as he alleges for himself, or if they had, they clear him only for the time of passing them, not for what ever thoughts might come after into his mind. Former actions of improvidence or fear, not with him unusual, cannot absolve him of all after meditations.

He goes on protesting his "no intention to have left Whitehall," had these horrid tumults given him but "fair quarter," as if he himself, his wife and children had been in peril. But to this enough hath been answered.

"Had this Parliament as it was in its first election," namely, with the Lord and Baron Bishops, "sat full and free," he doubts not but all had gone well. What warrant this of his to us? Whose not doubting was all good men's greatest doubt.

"He was resolved to hear reason, and to consent so far as he could comprehend." A hopeful resolution; what if his reason were found by oft experience to comprehend nothing beyond his own advantages, was this a reason fit to be intrusted with the common good of three nations?

"But," saith he, "as swine are to gardens, so are tumults to Parliaments." This the Parliament, had they found it so, could best have told us. In the meanwhile, who knows not that one great hog may do as much mischief in a garden, as many little swine.⁵

"He was sometimes prone to think that had he called this last Parliament to any other place in England, the sad consequences might have been prevented." But change of air changes not the mind. Was not his first Parliament at Oxford dissolved after two subsidies given him, and no justice received? Was not his last in the same place, where they sat with as much freedom, as much quiet from tumults, as they could desire, a Parliament both in his account, and their own, consisting of all his friends, that fled after him, and suffered for him, and yet by him nicknamed, and cashiered for a "mongrel Parliament that vexed his Queen with their base and mutinous motions," as his cabinet letter tells us? Whereby the world may see plainly, that no shifting of place, no sifting of members to his own mind, no number, no paucity, no freedom from tumults, could ever bring his arbitrary wilfulness, and tyrannical designs to brook the least shape or similitude, the least counterfeit of a Parliament.

Finally instead of praying for his people as a good King should do, he prays to be delivered from them, as "from wild beasts, inundations, and raging seas, that had overborne all loyalty, modesty, laws, justice, and religion." God save the people from such intercessors.

Oliver Cromwell 1599–1658

Oliver Cromwell's brutal conquest of Ireland (1649–1650) was the culmination of a long military, political, and religiously zealous career and the turning point in his rise to the position of Lord Protector. He had risen steadily in the Parliamentary Army, serving in the early days of the Civil War as captain of a troop of horses and finally becoming the chief of the New Model

Army. Not only did he have stirred from their troops . . . "Ironsides" in tribute to their for the Puritan cause, and w power and that of his fello Charles I in January 1649, new Commonwealth was set due Ireland, where Irish Ro coalition and were gaining g

Cromwell's treatment of lution and left a legacy of de Parliament, he helped to bri his military defeats of both Parliament to guarantee libe the Catholics of New Ross, fused them: "if by liberty of to use plain dealing, and to will not be allowed of." Inde Protestants were tolerated. I and lames) of giving lands massacre of Drogheda-in Cromwell as cruel. In the fc massacre of the people of I conviction that had made h erty was used to justify Irish

Cromwell also used hi ther supplies, and to prome Ultimately, his power grew the pomp and trappings of tember 1658, it seemed as i a weak successor, and the C Restoration of 1660. If Crc Army contributed to the cableakest chapters in the Er

Relating the Several Great Forces There, in the Tal

> For the Honorable Speaker of the Parl Sir,

Your army! being sa

^{5.} Milton may echo the identification of the hog with Henry VIII for his failure to carry out a thorough and consistent reformation in Anthony Cilby's An Admonition to England and Scotland to Call Them to Repentance (Geneva, 1558).

^{6.} Charles called an opposition Parliament that met in Oxford on 22 January 1644 and that he ordered closed after disagreement with them. This Parliament first attempted a peaceful settlement with the Westminster Parliament and then declared it guilty of treason. The King called it his "mongrel Parliament."

^{1.} The letter is addressed to Parmander of the parliamentary an

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