

**AN ESSAY ON THE PROSE
OF JOHN
MILTON. INAUGURAL
DISSERTATION**

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An Essay on the Prose of John Milton. Inaugural Dissertation by Jules Vodoz

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AN ESSAY
ON THE
PROSE OF JOHN MILTON.

INAUGURAL-DISSERTATION
ZUR
ERLANGUNG DER DOCTORWÜRDE
DER I. SEKTION
DER
HOHEN PHILOSOPHISCHEN FAKULTÄT
DER
UNIVERSITÄT ZÜRICH

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INTRODUCTION.

WHEN, about the year 1640, Milton was whirled into politics, he ceased to be a poet "soaring in the high region of his fancies, with his garland and singing robes about him," and was brought "to sit below in the cool element of prose,"¹ entering thus into the second period of his life, which Pattison so well characterises as a drama in three acts. "The first discovers him in the calm and peaceful retirement of Horton, of which *l'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Lycidas* are the expression. In the second act he is breathing the foul and heated atmosphere of party passion and religious hatred, generating the lurid fires which glare in the battailous canticles of his prose pamphlets.—The three great poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, are the utterance of his final period of solitary and Promethean grandeur, when blind, destitute, friendless, he testified of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, alone before a fallen world."²

The second part of his life as a writer may then be timed from 1641 to the end of the Commonwealth, 1660, and the whole number of his political pamphlets is twenty-five. Of these, twenty-one are written in English, and four in Latin. Nine relate to church government, or ecclesiastical affairs;³ eight treat of the various crises of the

¹ Reason of Church Government. II. Introduction.

² M. Pattison, "Milton," *Engl. Men of Letters Series*, p. 14.

³ 1. Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England. May 1641. 2. Of Prelatical Episcopacy. June 1641. 3. Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's defence against Smectymnuus. July 1641. 4. Reason of Church Government. Febr. 1642. 5. Apology against a pamphlet called a modest confutation. March 1642. 6. A treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes. 1659. 7. Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove Hirelings out of the Church. 1659. 8. Brief notes upon a late Sermon by Dr. Griffiths. 1660. 9. Of true Religion, Heresy and Schism. 1673.

civil strife,¹ and two are personal vindications of himself against one of his antagonists.² There remain to be mentioned four pamphlets on divorce, 1643—1645, his tractate:—"Of Education:—to Master Samuel Hartlib" (1644), and one tract of which the subject is of a more general and permanent nature, the best known of all the series:—"Areopagitica:—A Speech for the Liberty of unlicensed Printing, to the Parliament of England," 1644.—The whole series extends thus over a period of somewhat less than twenty years; the earliest, viz. "Of Reformation touching Church Discipline in England, and the causes that hitherto have hindered it," having been published in 1641, the latest, entitled:—"A ready and easy way to establish a free Commonwealth," coming out in March 1660, after the torrent of royalism had set in which was to sweep away the men and the cause to which Milton had devoted himself; this is the boldest and most powerful of all Milton's English pamphlets. It is full of undying republican fervour, of unmitigated hatred and contempt of the Stuart dynasty, but also full of a wailing and mournful earnestness, and a desperate secret sense of a lost cause runs through it.

Milton's hand is also to be clearly traced in the leading articles of a newspaper entitled "Mercurius politicus," which appeared about 1650; some of them may even be wholly of his composition.

To complete the list of his prose writings we have to mention:—"Accedence Commenced Grammar" (1669), a Latin Grammar written in English; "History of Britain," to the conquest (1670); "Of true religion, heresy, schism, toleration, and what best means may be used against the Growth of Popery," his latest utterance on theological topics, published by him the year before his death, 1673. The only matter really discussed in the pages of the tract is the limit of toleration.—Seven years after his death, in 1681, there was published:—

¹ 1. Tenure of kings and magistrates. Spring 1649. 2. Observations on Ormond's Articles of Peace, &c. May 1649. 3. Eiconoclastes. October 1649. 4. Letter to a Friend concerning the Rupture of the Commonwealth. 1653. 5. Pro populo Anglicano defensio. 1650. 6. Defensio Secunda. 1654. 7. The present means, and brief delineation of a free Commonwealth. 1659. 8. The Ready and Easy Way. 1660.

² 1. *Autoris pro se Defensio contra Morum*. 1655. 2. *Autoris Responsio*.

"Mr. John Milton's Character of the Long Parliament, and Assembly of Divines," a passage said to have been omitted from the "History of Britain," and, in 1682, a compilation appeared:—"A brief history of Moscovia."—In 1743, a certain John Nickolls edited:—"The Milton Papers," consisting of letters and addresses to Cromwell and other influential men of the Commonwealth.—



