

**MILTON'S AREOPAGITICA: A
SPEECH FOR THE LIBERTY OF
UNLICENSED PRINTING, WITH
NOTES FOR THE USE OF
SCHOOLS**

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Milton's Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing, with Notes for the Use of Schools by T. G. Osborn

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BY

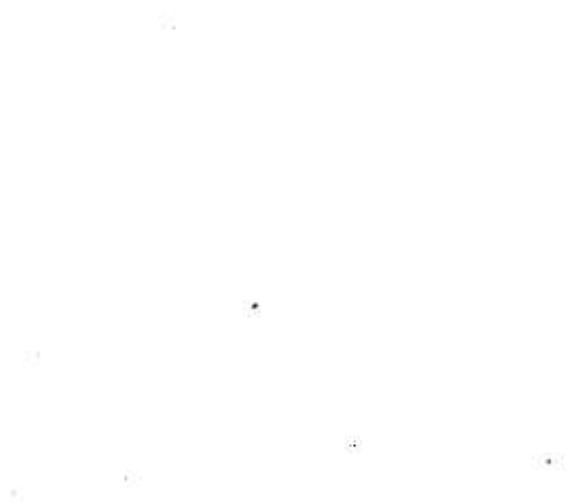
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MILTON'S AREOPAGITICA.



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Fig. 1. Relationship between the number of species (S) and the number of individuals (N) in a community. The solid line is the theoretical relationship $S = 100(1 - 1/N)$. The dashed line is the observed relationship.

MILTON'S AREOPAGITICA.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE early history of the practice of licensing books is set forth at sufficient length by Milton in the following pages. What he omitted is given in full in those passages of the 'History of the Council of Trent' which are to be found in the Appendix, and which he evidently had before him when he wrote the 'Areopagitica.'

To give a complete view of the subject, it is necessary to add a sketch of the history of the Licensing Laws in our own country.

'In England, as in other countries,' says Blackstone, 'the art of printing, soon after its introduction, was looked upon as merely a matter of state, and subject to the coercion of the crown. It was therefore regulated with us by the king's proclamations, prohibitions, charters of privilege and of license, and finally by the decrees of the Court of Star Chamber; which limited the number of printers and of presses which each should employ, and prohibited new publications unless previously approved by proper licensers.'¹

¹ Blackstone, vol. iv.

In the reign of Henry VIII. the Crown assumed absolute control over printing, partly by the king's general prerogative and partly by virtue of his ecclesiastical supremacy. Thus it became usual to grant by letters patent the exclusive right of printing the Bible¹ or religious books, and afterwards all others. The Stationers' Company, which was founded in the reign of Mary (1555), was allowed a monopoly of printing presses, but was obliged to purchase this privilege by submission to the regulations of the Star Chamber. These not only limited the number of presses and the men who should be employed on them, but subjected new publications to the previous inspection of a licenser. The Star Chamber again, in 1585, restricted all presses to London, Oxford, and Cambridge, and nothing was to be printed without allowance of the Council. The regular establishment of licensers of the press is generally attributed to Archbishop Laud's influence. At his trial in 1644 the charge was brought against him, 'That, having obtained the sole licensing of the press by a declaration of the Star Chamber in 1637, he had prohibited sundry orthodox works formerly printed and sold by authority, as the Geneva Bible with notes, &c.' To the Archbishop's reply, that the decree was the act of the whole Court and not his, the managers rejoined that it was procured by him with a design to enlarge his jurisdiction. This decree, which is stated in the preamble to be a revision of that of 1585, formed the basis of all subsequent regulations. All books were prohibited except those which had been duly entered with the Stationers' Company and licensed in the following way : books of law

¹ This monopoly has been maintained in favour of the Royal printers up to the present day: it was abolished for a time under the Commonwealth with very unfortunate results.