

# FARRER JAMES ANSON

BOOKS CONDEMNED TO  
BE BURNT

**James Farrer**  
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# James Anson Farrer

## Books Condemned to be Burnt

### PREFACE

*WHEN did books first come to be burnt in England by the common hangman, and what was the last book to be so treated? This is the sort of question that occurs to a rational curiosity, but it is just this sort of question to which it is often most difficult to find an answer. Historians are generally too engrossed with the details of battles, all as drearily similar to one another as scenes of murder and rapine must of necessity be, to spare a glance for the far brighter and more instructive field of the mutations or of the progress of manners. The following work is an attempt to supply the deficiency on this particular subject.*

*I am indebted to chance for having directed me to the interest of book-burning as an episode in the history of the world's manners, the discursive allusions to it in the old numbers of "Notes and Queries" hinting to me the desirability of a more systematic mode of treatment. To bibliographers and literary historians I conceived that such a work might prove of utility and interest, and possibly serve to others as an introduction and incentive to a branch of our literary history that is not without its fascination. But I must also own to a less unselfish motive, for I imagined that not without its*

*reward of delight would be a temporary sojourn among the books which, for their boldness of utterance or unconventional opinions, were not only not received by the best literary society of their day, but were with ignominy expelled from it. Nor was I wrong in my calculation.*

*But could I impart or convey the same delight to others? Clearly all that I could do was to invite them to enter on the same road, myself only subserving the humble functions of a signpost. I could avoid merely compiling for them a bibliographical dictionary, but I could not treat at length of each offender in my catalogue, without, in so exhausting my subject, exhausting at the same time my reader's patience. I have tried therefore to give something of the life of their history and times to the authors with whom I came in contact; to cast a little light on the idiosyncrasies or misfortunes of this one or of that; but to do them full justice, and to enable the reader to make their complete acquaintance, how was that possible with any regard for the laws of literary proportion? All I could do was to aim at something less dull than a dictionary, but something far short of a history.*

*I trust that no one will be either attracted or alarmed by any anticipations suggested by the title of my book. Although primarily a book for the library, it is also one of which no drawing-room table need be the least afraid. If I have found anything in my condemned authors which they would have done better to have left unsaid, I have, in referring to their fortunes, felt under no compulsion to reproduce their indiscretions. But, in all of them put*

*together, I doubt whether there is as much to offend a scrupulous taste as in many a latter-day novel, the claim of which to the distinction of burning is often as indisputable as the certainty of its regrettable immunity from that fiery but fitting fate.*

*The custom I write about suggests some obvious reflections on the mutability of our national manners. Was the wisdom of our ancestors really so much greater than our own, as many profess to believe? If so, it is strange with how much of that wisdom we have learnt to dispense. One by one their old customs have fallen away from us, and I fancy that if any gentleman could come back to us from the seventeenth century, he would be less astonished by the novel sights he would see than by the old familiar sights he would miss. He would see no one standing in the pillory, no one being burnt at a stake, no one being "swum" for witchcraft, no one's veracity being tested by torture, and, above all, no hangman burning books at Cheapside, no unfortunate authors being flogged all the way from Fleet Street to Westminster. The absence of these things would probably strike him more than even the railways and the telegraph wires. Returning with his old-world ideas, he would wonder how life and property had survived the removal of their time-honoured props, or how, when all fear of punishment had been removed from the press, Church and State were still where he had left them. Reflecting on these things, he would recognise the fact that he himself had been living in an age of barbarism from which we, his posterity, were in process of gradual emergence. What vistas of still further improvement*

would not then be conjured up before his mind!

We can hardly wonder at our ancestors burning books when we recollect their readiness to burn one another. It was not till the year 1790 that women ceased to be liable to be burnt alive for high or for petit treason, and Blackstone found nothing to say against it. He saw nothing unfair in burning a woman for coining, but in only hanging a man. "The punishment of petit treason," he says, "in a man is to be drawn and hanged, and in a woman to be drawn and burned; the idea of which latter punishment seems to have been handed down to us by the ancient Druids, which condemned a woman to be burnt for murdering her husband, and it is now the usual punishment for all sorts of treasons committed by those of the female sex." Not a suspicion seems to have crossed the great jurist's mind that the supposed barbarity of the Druids was not altogether a conclusive justification for the barbarity of his own contemporaries. So let us take warning from his example, and let the history of our practice of book-burning serve to help us to keep our minds open with regard to anomalies which may still exist amongst us, descended from as suspicious an origin, and as little supported by reason.

# INTRODUCTION

THERE is the sort of attraction that belongs to all forbidden fruit in books which some public authority has condemned to the flames. And seeing that to collect something is a large part of the secret of human happiness, it occurred to me that a variety of the happiness that is sought in book collecting might be found in making a collection of books of this sort. I have, therefore, put together the following narrative of our burnt literature as some kind of aid to any book-lover who shall choose to take my hint and make the peculiarity I have indicated the key-note to the formation of his library.

But the aid I offer is confined to books so condemned in the United Kingdom. Those who would pursue the study farther afield, and extend their wishes beyond the four seas, will find all the aid they need or desire in Peignot's admirable *Dictionnaire Critique, Littéraire, et Bibliographique des principaux Livres condamnés au feu, supprimés ou censurés*: Paris, 1806. To have extended my studies to cover this wider ground would have swollen my book as well as my labour beyond the limits of my inclination. I may mention that Hart's *Index Expurgatorius* covers this wider ground for England, as far as it goes.

Nevertheless, I may, perhaps, appropriately, by way of introduction, refer to some episodes and illustrations of book-burning, to show the place the custom had in the development



of civilisation, and the distinction of good or bad company and ancient lineage enjoyed by such books as their punishment by burning entitles to places on the shelves of our fire-library. The custom was of pagan observance long before it passed into Christian practice; and for its existence in Greece, and for the first instance I know of, I would refer to the once famous or notorious work of Protagoras, certainly one of the wisest philosophers or sophists of ancient times. He was the first avowed Agnostic, for he wrote a work on the gods, of which the very first remark was that the existence of gods at all he could not himself either affirm or deny. For this offensive sentiment his book was publicly burnt; but Protagoras, could he have foreseen the future, might have esteemed himself happy to have lived before the Christian epoch, when authors came to share with their works the purifying process of fire. The world grew less humane as well as less sensible as it grew older, and came to think more of orthodoxy than of any other condition of the mind.

The virtuous Romans appear to have been greater book-burners than the Greeks, both under the Republic and under the Empire. It was the Senate's function to condemn books to the flames, and the prætor's to see that it was done, generally in the Forum. But for this evil habit we might still possess many valuable works, such as the books attributed to Numa on Pontifical law (Livy xl.), and those eulogies of Pætus Thræsea and Helvidius, which were burnt, and their authors put to death, under the tyranny of Domitian (Tacitus, Agricola 2). Let these

cases suffice to connect the custom with Pagan Rome, and to prove that this particular mode of warring with the expression of free thought boasts its precedents in pre-Christian antiquity.

Nevertheless it is the custom as it was manifested in Christian times that has chief interest for us, because it is only with condemned books of this period that we have any chance of practical acquaintance. Some of these survived the flames, whilst none of antiquity's burning have come down to us. But on what principle it was that the burning authorities (in France generally the Parlement of Paris, or of the provinces), burnt some books, whilst others were only censured, condemned, or suppressed, I am unable to say, and I doubt whether any principle was involved. Peignot has noticed the chief books stigmatised by authority in all these various ways; but though undoubtedly this wider view is more philosophical, the view is quite comprehensive enough which confines itself to the consideration of books that were condemned to be burnt.

Books so treated may be classified according as they offended against (i) the religion, (ii) the morals, or (iii) the politics of the day, those against the first being by far the most numerous, and so admitting here of notice only of their most conspicuous specimens.

I. Of all the books burnt for offence under the first head, the most to be regretted, from an historical point of view, I take to be Porphyry's *Treatise against the Christians*, which was burnt a. d. 388 by order of Theodosius the Great. Porphyry believed that

Daniel's prophecies had been written after the events foretold in them by some one who took the name of Daniel. It would have been interesting to have known Porphyry's grounds for this not improbable opinion, as well as his general charges against the Christians; and if there is anything in the tradition of the survival of a copy of Porphyry in one of the libraries of Florence, the testimony of the distinguished Platonist may yet enlighten us on the causes of the growing darkness of the age in which he lived.

All the books of the famous Abelard were burnt by order of Pope Innocent II.; but it was his *Treatise on the Trinity*, condemned by the Council of Soissons about 1121, and by the Council of Sens in 1140, which chiefly led St. Bernard to his cruel persecution of this famous man. That great saint, using the habitual language of ecclesiastical charity, called Abelard an infernal dragon and the precursor of Antichrist. Among his heresies Abelard seems to have held the opinion that the devil has no power over man; but at all events the Church had in those days, as Abelard learnt to his cost, though, considering that his disciple Arnauld of Brescia was destined to be burnt alive at Rome in 1155, Abelard might have deemed himself fortunate in only incurring imprisonment, and not sharing the fate of his works as well as that of his illustrious follower.

The latter calamity befell John Huss, who, having been led before the bishop's palace to see his own condemned works burnt, was then led on to be burnt himself, in 1415. Many of his works, however, were republished in the following century; but

the twenty-nine errors which the Council of Constance detected in his work on the Church would probably nowadays seem venial enough. It was his misfortune to live in those days when the inhumanity of the world was at its climax.

It continued at that climax for some time, though heretical authors were not always burnt with their books. Enjedim, for instance, the Hungarian Socinian, who died in 1596, survived the burning in many places of his "Explanations of Difficult Passages of the Old and New Testament, from which the Dogma of the Trinity is usually established" (*Explicationes locorum difficilium*, etc.). Peter d'Osma also, the Spanish theologian, whose *Treatise on Confession* was condemned by the Archbishop of Toledo in the fifteenth century, might have esteemed himself happy that only his chair shared the burning of his book. Pomponacius, an Italian professor of philosophy, whose *Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul* (1516), was burnt by the Venetians for the heretical opinion that the soul's immortality was not believed by Aristotle, and could only be proved by Scripture and the authority of the Church, seems to have died peacefully in 1526, albeit with the reputation of an atheist, which his writings do not support. Despériers was only imprisoned when his *Cymbalum Mundi*, censured by the Sorbonne, was consigned to the flames by the Parlement of Paris (March 7th, 1537). And Luther, all of whose works were condemned to be burnt by the Diet of Worms (1521), actually survived their burning twenty-five years, though he himself had publicly burnt at Wittenberg

Leo X.'s bull, anathematising his books, as well as the Decretals of previous Popes.

Less fortunate than these were the famous martyrs of free thought, Dolet, Servetus, and Tyndale. All the works, which Dolet wrote or printed, were burnt as heretical by the Parlement of Paris (February 14th, 1543), and himself hanged and burnt three years later (August 3rd, 1546), at the age of thirty-seven. The reason seems chiefly to have been Dolet's unsparing exposure of the immoralities of monks and priests, and of the plan of the Sorbonne to put down the art of printing in France. In Peignot is preserved a long list of the names of the works to the publication of which he lent his aid.

The burning of Servetus, the Parisian doctor, at Geneva (October 27th, 1553), because his opinions on the Trinity did not agree with Calvin's, is of course the greatest blot on the memory of Calvin. All his books or manuscripts were burnt with him or elsewhere, so that his works are among the rarest of bibliographical treasures, and his *Christianismi Restitutio* (1553) is said to be the rarest book in the world. But apart from their rarity, I should hardly imagine that the works of Servetus possessed the slightest interest, or that their loss was the smallest loss to the literature of the world.

But if Calvin must bear the burden of the death of Servetus, Christianity itself is responsible for the death of William Tyndale, who, deeming it desirable that his countrymen should possess in their own language the book on which their

religion was founded, took the infinite trouble of translating the Scriptures into English. His New Testament was forthwith burnt in London, and himself after some years strangled and burnt at Antwerp (1536).

The same literary persecution continued in the next century, the seventeenth. Bissendorf perished at the hands of the executioner at the same time that his books, *Nodi gordii resolutio* (on the priestly calling), 1624, and *The Jesuits*, were burnt by the same agent. In the case of the *De Republicâ Ecclesiasticâ* (1617) by De Dominis, Christian savagery surpassed itself, for not only was it burnt by sentence of the Inquisition, but also the dead body of its author was exhumed for the purpose. Dominis had been a Jesuit for twenty years, then a bishop, and finally Archbishop of Spalatro. This office he gave up, and retired to England, where he might write with greater freedom than in Italy. There he wrote this work and a history of the Council of Trent. His chief offence was his advocacy of the unchristian principles of toleration; he wished to reunite and reconcile the Christian communions. But alas for human frailty! he retracted his errors, many of them most sensible opinions, in London, and again at Rome, whither he returned. Pope Urban VIII., however, imprisoned him in the Castle of St. Angelo, where he is said to have died of poison, so that only his dead body was available to burn with his book the same year (1625). Literary lives were tragic in those times.

Simon Morin was burnt with all the copies of his *Pensées* that could be found, on the Place de Grève, at Paris, March 14th,

1663. Morin called himself the Son of Man, and such thoughts of his as survived the fire do not lead us in his case to grudge the flames their literary fuel. But it is curious to think that we are only two centuries from the time when the Parlement of Paris could pass such a sentence on such a sufferer.

The Parlement of Dijon condemned to be burnt by the executioner Morisot's *Ahitophili Veritatis Lacrymæ* (July 4th, 1625), but though this work was a violent satire upon the Jesuits, Morisot survived his book thirty-six years, the Jesuits revenging themselves with nothing worse than an epitaph, containing a bad pun, to the effect that their enemy, after a life not spent in wisdom, preferred to die as a fool (*Voluit mori-sot*).

In the same century Molinos, the Spanish priest, and founder of Quietism, wrote his *Conduite Spirituelle*, which was condemned to the flames for sixty-eight heretical propositions, whilst its author was consigned to the prisons of the Inquisition, where he died after eleven years of it (1696). Self-absorption of the soul in God to the point of complete indifference to anything done to or by the body, even to the sufferings of the latter in hell, was the doctrine of Quietism that led ecclesiastic authority to feel its usual alarm for consequences; and it must be admitted that similar doctrines have at times played sad havoc with Christian morality. But perhaps they helped Molinos the better to bear his imprisonment.

I may next refer to seventeenth-century writers who were fortunate enough not to share the burning of their books. (1)

Wolkelius, a friend of Socinus, the edition of whose book *De Verâ Religione*, published at Amsterdam in 1645, was there burnt by order of the magistrates for its Socinian doctrines, appears to have lived for many years afterwards. Schlictingius, a Polish follower of the same faith, escaped with expulsion from Poland, when the Diet condemned his book, *Confessio Fidei Christianæ*, to be burnt by the executioner. Sainte Foi, or Gerberon, whose *Miroir de la Vérité Chrétienne* was condemned by several bishops and archbishops, and burnt by order of the Parlement of Aix (1678), lived to write other works, of probably as little interest. La Peyrère was only imprisoned at Brussels for his book on the *Pre-adamites*, which was burnt at Paris (1655). And Pascal saw his famous *Lettres à un Provincial*, which made too free with the dignity of all authorities, secular and religious, twice burnt, once in French (1657), and once in Latin (1660), without himself incurring a similar penalty. So did Derodon, professor of philosophy at Nismes, outlive the *Disputatio* (1645), in which he made light of Cyril of Alexandria, and which was condemned and burnt by the Parlement of Toulouse for its opposition to some beliefs of Roman Catholicism.

Passing now to the eighteenth century, we find book-burning, then declining in England, in full vigour on the Continent.

The most important book that so suffered was Rousseau's admirable treatise on education, entitled *Émile* (1762), condemned by the Parlement of Paris to be torn and burnt at the foot of its great staircase. It was also burnt at Geneva. Three years



later the same writer's *Lettres de la Montagne* were sentenced by the same tribunal to the same fate. Not all burnt books should be read, but Rousseau's *Émile* is one that should be.

So should the Marquis de Langle's *Voyage en Espagne*, condemned to the flames in 1788, but translated into English, German, and Italian. De Langle anticipated this fate for his book if it ever passed the Pyrenees: "So much the better," said he; "the reader loves the books they burn, so does the publisher, and the author; it is his blue ribbon." But, considering that he wrote against the Inquisition, and similar inhumanities or follies of Catholicism, De Langle must have been surprised at the burning of his book in Paris itself.

A book at whose burning we may feel less surprise is the *Théologie Portative ou Dictionnaire abrégé de la Religion Chrétienne*, by the Abbé Bernier (1775), for a long time attributed to Voltaire, but really the work of an apostate monk, Dulaurent, who took refuge in Holland to write this and similar works.

The number of books of a similar strong anti-Catholic tendency that were burnt in these years before the outbreak of the Revolution should be noticed as helping to explain that event. Their titles in most cases may suffice to indicate their nature. De la Mettrie's *L'homme Machine* (1748) was written and burnt in Holland, its author being a doctor, of whom Voltaire said that he was a madman who only wrote when he was drunk. Of a similar kind was the *Testament* of Jean Meslier, published

posthumously in the *Evangile de la Raison*, and condemned to the flames about 1765. On June 11th, 1763, the Parlement of Paris ordered to be burnt an anonymous poem, called *La Religion à l'Assemblée du Clergé de France*, in which the writer depicted in dark colours the morals of the French bishops of the time (1762). On January 29th, 1768, was treated in the same way the *Histoire Impartiale des Jésuites* of Linguet, whose *Annales Politiques* in 1779 conducted him to the Bastille, and who ultimately died at the hands of the Revolutionary Tribunal (1794). But the 18th of August, 1770, is memorable for having seen all the seven following books sentenced to burning by the Parlement of Paris:

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1. Woolston's *Discours sur les Miracles de Jésus-Christ*, translated from the English (1727).
2. Boulanger's *Christianisme dévoilé*.
3. Freret's *Examen Critique des Apologistes de la Religion Chrétienne*, 1767.
4. The *Examen Impartial des Principales Religions du Monde*.
5. Baron d'Holbach's *Contagion Sacrée, or l'Histoire Naturelle de la Superstition*, 1768.
6. Holbach's *Système de la Nature ou des Lois du Monde Physique et du Monde Moral*.
7. Voltaire's *Dieu et les Hommes; œuvre théologique, mais raisonnable* (1769).

No one writer, indeed, of the eighteenth century contributed so many books to the flames as Voltaire. Besides the above work,

the following of his works incurred the same fate: – (1) the *Lettres Philosophiques* (1733), (2) the *Cantique des Cantiques* (1759), (3) the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764), also burnt at Geneva; (4) *L'Homme aux Quarante Écus* (1767), (5) *Le Dîner du Comte de Boulainvilliers* (1767). When we add to these burnings the fact that at least fourteen works of Voltaire were condemned, many others suppressed or forbidden, their author himself twice imprisoned in the Bastille, and often persecuted or obliged to fly from France, we must admit that seldom or never had any writer so eventful a literary career.

II. Turning now to the books that were burnt for their real or supposed immoral tendency, I may refer briefly in chronological order to the following as the principal offenders, though of course there is not always a clear distinction between what was punished as immoral and punished as irreligious. This applies to the four volumes of the works of the Carmelite Mantuanus, published at Antwerp in 1576, of which nearly all the copies were burnt. This facile poet, who is said to have composed 59,000 verses, was especially severe against women and against the ecclesiastical profession. In 1664, the *Journal de Louis Gorin de Saint Amour*, a satirical work, was condemned, chiefly apparently because it contained the five propositions of Jansenius. In 1623, the Parlement of Paris condemned Théophile to be burnt with his book, *Le Parnasse des Poètes Satyriques*, but the author escaped with his burning in effigy, and with imprisonment in a dungeon. I am tempted to quote Théophile's impromptu reply to a man

who asserted that all poets were fools: —

"Oui, je l'avoue avec vous  
Que tous les poètes sont fous;  
Mais sachant ce que vous êtes  
Tous les fous ne sont pas poètes."

Hélot also escaped with a burning in effigy when his *L'Ecole des Filles* was burnt at the foot of the gallows (1672). Lyser, who spent his life and his property in the advocacy of polygamy, was threatened by Christian V. with capital punishment if he appeared in Denmark, and his *Discursus Politicus de Polygamia* was sentenced to public burning (1677).

In the eighteenth century (1717) Gigli's satire, the *Vocabulario di Santa Caterina e della lingua Sanese*; Dufresnoy's *Princesses Malabares, ou le Célibat Philosophique* (1734); Deslandes' *Pigmalion ou la Statue Animée* (1741); the Jesuit Busembaum's *Theologia Moralis* (which defends as an act of charity the commission to kill an excommunicated person), (1757); Toussaint's *Les Mœurs* (1748); and the Abbé Talbert's satirical poem, *Langrogné aux Enfers* (1760), — seem to complete the list of the principal works burnt by public authority. And of these the best is Toussaint's, who in 1764 published an apology for or retraction of his *Mœurs*, which has far less claim upon public attention than was obtained and merited by the original work.

III. Books condemned for some unpopular political tendency

may likewise be arranged in the order of their centuries.

In the sixteenth, the most important are Louis d'Orléans' *Expostulatio* (1593), a violent attack on Henri IV., and condemned by the Parlement of Paris; Archbishop Génébrard's *De sacrarum electionum jure et necessitate ad Ecclesiæ Gallicana redintegrationem* (1593), condemned by the Parlement of Aix, and its author exiled. He maintained the right of the clergy and people to elect bishops against their nomination by the king. It is curious that the Parlement of Paris thought it necessary to burn the Jesuit Mariana's book *De Rege* (1599) as anti-monarchical, seeing that it appeared with the privilege of the King of Spain. He maintained the right of killing a king for the cause of religion, and called Jacques Clement's act of assassination France's everlasting glory (*Galliæ æternum decus*). But it is only fair to add that the superior of the Order disapproved of the work as much as the Sorbonne.

In the seventeenth century, I notice first the *Ecclesiasticus* of Scioppius, a work directed against our James I. and Casaubon (1611). The libel having been burnt in London, and its author hanged and beaten in effigy before the king on the stage, was burnt in Paris by order of the Parlement, chiefly for its calumnies on Henri IV. The author, originally a Jesuit, has been called the Attila of writers, having been said to have known the abusive terms of all tongues, and to have had them on the tip of his own. He wrote 104 works, apparently of the violent sort, so that Casaubon called him, according to the style of learned men in

those days, "the most cruel of all wild beasts," whilst the Jesuits called him "the public pest of letters and society."

The Senate of Venice caused to be burnt the *Della Liberta Veneta*, by a man who called himself Squitino (1612), because it denied the independence of the Republic, and asserted that the Emperor had rightful claims over it; and about the same time (1617) the Parlement of Paris consigned to the same penalty D'Aubigné's *Histoire Universelle* for the freedom of its satire on Charles IX., Henri III., Henri IV., and other French royal personages of the time. The second edition of D'Aubigné (1626) is the poorer for being shorn of these caustic passages.

The Jesuit Keller's *Admonitio ad Ludovicum XIII.* (1625), and the same author's *Mysteria Politica*, (1625), were both sentenced to be burnt; also the Jesuit Sanctarel's *Tractatus de Hæresi* (1625), which claimed for the Pope the right to dispose, not only of the thrones, but also of the lives of princes. This doctrine was approved by the General of the Jesuits, but, under threat of being accounted guilty of treason, expressly disclaimed by the Jesuits as a body. In resisting such pretensions, the Sorbonne deserved well of France and of humanity. In 1665, the Châtelet ordered to be burnt Claude Joly's *Recueil des Maximes véritables et importantes pour l'Institution du Roi, contre la fausse et pernicieuse politique de Cardinal prétendu surintendant de l'éducation de Louis XIV.* (1652); a book which, if it had been regarded instead of being burnt, might have altered the character of that pernicious devastator, and therefore of history itself,

very much for the better. About the same time, Milton's *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, not to be burnt in England till the Restoration, had a foretaste in Paris of its ultimate fate. Eustache le Noble's satire against the Dutch, *Dialogue d'Esope et de Mercure*, and burnt by the executioner at Amsterdam, may complete the list of political works that paid for their offences by fire in the seventeenth century.

The first to notice in the next century is Giannone's *Historia Civile de Regno di Napoli* (1723), in five volumes, burnt by the Inquisition, which, but for his escape, would have suppressed the author as well as his book, for his free criticism of Popes and ecclesiastics. His escape saved the eighteenth century from the reproach of burning a writer. Next deserves a passing allusion the *Historia Nostri Temporis*, by the once famous writer Emmius, whose posthumous book suffered at the hands of George Albert, Prince of East Frisia. The Parlement of Toulouse condemned Reboulet's *Histoire des Filles de la Congrégation de l'Enfance* (1734) for accusing Madame de Moudonville, the founder of that convent, of publishing libels against the king. That of Paris and Besançon condemned Boncerf's *Des Inconvéniens des Droits Féodaux* (1770).

The number, indeed, of political works burnt during the eighth decade of the last century is as remarkable as the number of religious books so treated about the same period: one of the lesser indications of the coming Revolution. During this decade were condemned: (1) Pidanzet's *Correspondance secrète*

*familière de Chancelier Maupeon avec Sorhouet* (1771) for being blasphemous and seditious, and calculated to rouse people against government; a work that made sport of Maupeon and his Parlement. (2) Beaumarchais' *Mémoires* (1774), of the literary style of which Voltaire himself is said to have been jealous, but which was condemned to the flames for its imputations on the powers that were. (3) Lanjuinais' *Monarque Accompli* (1774), whose other title explains why it was condemned, as tending to sedition and revolt, *Prodiges de bonté, de savoir, et de sagesse, qui font l'éloge de Sa Majesté Impériale Joseph II., et qui rendent cet auguste monarque si précieux à l'humanité, discutés au tribunal de la raison et l'équité*. Lanjuinais, principal of a Catholic college in Switzerland, passed over to the Reformed Religion. (4) Martin de Marivaux's *L'Ami des Lois* (1775), a pamphlet, in which the author protested against the words put into the mouth of the king by Chancellor Maupeon, Sept. 7th, 1770: "We hold our Crown of God alone; the right of law-making, without dependence or partition, belongs to us alone." The author contended that the Crown was held only of the nation, and he excited the vengeance of the Crown by sending a copy of his work to each member of the Parlement. At the same time, to the same penalty and for the same offence, was condemned to the flames *Le Catéchisme du Citoyen, ou Elémens du Droit public Français, par demandes et par réponses*; the episode, and the origin of the dispute, clearly pointing to the rapidly approaching Revolutionary whirlwind, the spirit of which these literary productions anticipated and



expressed.

The last book I find to notice is the Abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des Etablissemens et du Commerce des Européens dans les Deux Indes*, published in 1771 at Geneva, and, after a first attempt at suppression in 1779, finally burnt by the order of the Parlement of Paris of May 25th, 1781, as impious, blasphemous, seditious, and the rest. Like many another eminent writer, Raynal had started as a Jesuit.

From the above illustrations of the practice abroad, we may turn to a more detailed account of its history in England. Although in France it was much more common than in England during the eighteenth century, it appears to have come to an end in both countries about the same time. I am not aware of any proofs that it survived the French Revolution, and it is probable that that event, directly or indirectly, put an end to it. In England it seems gradually to have dwindled, and to have become extinct before the end of the century. If the same was the case in other countries, it would afford another instance of the fundamental community of development which seems to govern at least our part of the civilised world, regardless of national differences or boundaries. The different countries of the world seem to throw off evil habits, or to acquire new habits, with a degree of simultaneity which is all the more remarkable for being the result of no sort of agreement. At one time, for instance, they throw off Jesuitism, at another the practice of torture, at another the judicial ordeal, at another burnings for heresy, at another trials

for witchcraft, at another book-burning; and now the turn seems approaching of war, or the trade of professional murder. The custom here to be dealt with, therefore, holds its place in the history of humanity, and is as deserving of study as any other custom whose rise and decline constitute a phase in the world's development.

# CHAPTER I.

## Sixteenth Century Book-Fires

FIRE, which is the destruction of so many things, and destined, according to old Indian belief, one day to destroy the world, is so peculiarly the enemy of books, that the worm itself is not more fatal to them. Whole libraries have fallen a prey to the flames, and oftener, alas! by design than accident; the warrior always, whether Alexander at Persepolis, Antiochus at Jerusalem, Cæsar and Omar at Alexandria, or General Ulrich at Strasburg (in 1870), esteeming it among the first duties of his barbarous calling to consign ideas and arts to destruction.

But these are the fires of indiscriminate rage, due to the natural antagonism between civilisation and military barbarism; it is fire, discriminately applied, that attaches a special interest and value to books condemned to it. Whether the sentence has come from Pope or Archbishop, Parliament or King, the book so sentenced has a claim on our curiosity, and as often on our respect as our disdain. Fire, indeed, has been spoken of as the blue ribbon of literature, and many a modern author may fairly regret that such a distinction is no longer attainable in these days of enlightened advertisement.

To collect books that have been dishonoured – or honoured – in this way, books that at the risk of heavy punishment have

been saved from the public fire or the common hangman, is no mean amusement for a bibliophile. Some collect books for their bindings, some for their rarity, a minority for their contents; but he who collects a fire-library makes all these considerations secondary to the associations of his books with the lives of their authors and their place in the history of ideas. Perhaps he is thereby the more rational collector, if reason at all need be considered in the matter; for if my whim pleases myself, let him go hang who disdains or disapproves of it.

All the books of such a library are not, of course, suitable for general reading, there being not a few disgraceful ones among them that fully deserved the stigma intended for them. But most are innocent enough, and many of them as dull as the authors of their condemnation; whilst others, again, are so sparkling and well written that I wish it were possible to rescue them from the oblivion that enshrouds them even more thickly than the dust of centuries. The English books of this sort naturally stand apart from their foreign rivals, and may be roughly classified according as they deal with the affairs of State or Church. The original flavour has gone from many of them, like the scent from dried flowers, with the dispute or ephemeral motive that gave rise to them; but a new flavour from that very fact has taken the place of the old, of the same sort that attaches to the relics of extinct religions or of bygone forms of life.

The history of our country since the days of printing is exactly reflected in its burnt literature, and so little has the

public fire been any respecter of class or dignity, that no branch of intellectual activity has failed to contribute some author whose work, or works, has been consigned to the flames. Our greatest poets, philosophers, bishops, lawyers, novelists, heads of colleges, are all represented in my collection, forming indeed a motley but no insipid society, wherein the gravest questions of government and the deepest problems of speculation are handled with freedom, and men who were most divided in their lives meet at last in a common bond of harmony. Cowell, the friend of prerogative, finds himself here side by side with Milton, the republican; and Sacheverell, the high churchman, in close company with Tindal and Defoe.

For nearly 300 years the rude censorship of fire was applied to literature in England, beginning naturally in that fierce religious war we call the Reformation, which practically constitutes the history of England for some two centuries. The first grand occasion of book-burning was in response to the Pope's sentence against Martin Luther, when Wolsey went in state to St. Paul's, and many of Luther's publications were burned in the churchyard during a sermon against them by Fisher, Bishop of Rochester (1521).

But the first printed work by an Englishman that was so treated was actually the Gospel. The story is too familiar to repeat, of the two occasions on which Tyndale's New Testament in English was burnt before Old St. Paul's; but in pausing to reflect that the book which met with this fiery fate, and whose

author ultimately met with the same, is now sold in England by the million (for our received version is substantially Tyndale's), one can only stand aghast at the irony of the fearful contrast, which so widely separated the labourer from his triumph. But perhaps we can scarcely wonder that our ancestors, after centuries of mental blindness, should have tried to burn the light they were unable to bear, causing it thereby only to shine the brighter.

It certainly spread with remarkable celerity; for in 1546 it became necessary to command all persons possessing them to deliver to the bishop, or sheriff, to be openly burnt, all works in English purporting to be written by Frith, Tyndale, Wicliff, Joye, Basil, Bale, Barnes, Coverdale, Turner, or Tracy. The extreme rarity and costliness of the works of these men are the measure of the completeness with which this order was carried out; but not of its success, for the ideas survived the books which contained them. A list of the books is given in Foxe (v. 566), and comprises twelve by Coverdale, twenty-eight by Bale, thirteen by Basil (*alias* Becon), ten by Frith, nine by Tyndale, seven by Joye, six by Turner, three by Barnes. Some of these may still be read, but more are non-existent. A complete account of them and their authors would almost amount to a history of the Reformation itself; but as they were burnt indiscriminately, as heretical books, they have not the same interest that attaches to books specifically condemned as heretical or seditious. Such of them, however, as a book-lover can light upon – and pay for – are, of course, treasures

of the highest order.

Great numbers of books were burnt in the reigns of Edward VI. and Mary, but it is not till the reign of the latter that a particular book stands forward as maltreated in this way. And, indeed, so many men were burnt in the reign of Queen Mary, that the burning of particular books may well have passed unnoticed, though pyramids of Protestant volumes, as Mr. D'Israeli says, were burnt in those few years of intolerance rampant and triumphant. The *Historie of Italie*, by William Thomas (1549), is sometimes said (on what authority I know not) to have been not merely burnt, but burnt by the common hangman, at this time. If so, it is the first that achieved a distinction which is generally claimed for Prynne's *Histriomastix* (1633). The fact of the mere burning is of itself likely enough, for Thomas wrote very freely of the clergy at Rome and of Pope Paul III.: "By report, Rome is not without 40,000 harlots, maintained for the most part by the clergy and their followers." "Oh! what a world it is to see the pride and abomination that the churchmen there maintain." Yet Thomas himself had held a Church living, and had been clerk of the Council to Edward VI. He was among the ablest men of his time, and wrote, among other works, a lively defence of Henry VIII. in a work called *Peregryne*, on the title-page of which are these lines:

"He that dieth with honour, liveth for ever,  
And the defamed dead recovereth never."

And a sadly inglorious death was destined to be his own. For, shortly after Wyatt's insurrection, he was sent to the Tower, Wyatt at his own trial declaring that the conspiracy to assassinate Queen Mary when out walking was Thomas's, he himself having been opposed to it. For this cause, at all events, Thomas was hanged and quartered in May 1554, and his head set the next day upon London Bridge. He assured the crowd, in a speech before his execution, that he died for his country. Wood says he was of a hot, fiery spirit, that had sucked in damnable principles. Possibly they were not otherwise than sensible, for if he died on Wyatt's evidence alone, one cannot feel sure that he died justly. But had the insurrection only succeeded, it is curious to think what an amount of misery might have been spared to England, and how dark a page been lacking from the history of Christianity!

Thomas's book was republished in 1561: but the first edition, that of 1549, is, of course, the right one to possess; though its fate has caused it to be extremely rare.

Coming now to Queen Elizabeth's reign, the comparative rarity of book-burning is an additional testimony to the wisdom of her government. But (to say nothing of books that were prohibited or got their printers or authors into trouble) certain works, religious, political, and poetical, achieved the distinction of being publicly burnt, and they are works that curiously illustrate the manners of the time.

The most important under the first of these heads are the



translations of the works of Hendrick Niclas, of Leyden, Father of the Family of Love, or House of Charity, which were thought dangerous enough to be burnt by Royal Proclamation on October 13th, 1579; so that such works as the *Joyful Message of the Kingdom, Peace upon Earth, the Prophecy of the Spirit of Love*, and others, are now exceedingly rare and costly. There are many extracts from the first of these in Knewstub's *Confutation "of its monstrous and horrible blasphemies"* (1579), wherein I fail to recognise either the blasphemies or their confutation, nor do I find anything but sense in Niclas's letter to two daughters of Warwick, whom he seeks to dissuade from suffering death on a matter of conformity to certain Church ceremonies. He insists on the life or spirit of Christ as of more importance than any ceremony. "How well would they do who do now extol themselves before the simple, and say that they are the preachers of Christ, if they would first learn to know Christ before they made themselves ministers of Him!" "Whatever is served without the Spirit of Christ, it is an abomination to God." Nevertheless the young persons seem to have preferred death to his very sensible advice.

Probably the Family of Love were misunderstood and misrepresented, both as regards their doctrines and their practices. Camden says that "under a show of singular integrity and sanctity they insinuated themselves into the affections of the ignorant common people"; that they regarded as reprobate all outside their Family, and deemed it lawful to deny on oath

whatsoever they pleased. Niclas, according to Fuller, "wanted learning in himself and hated it in others." This is a failing so common as to be very probable, as it also is, that his disciples allegorised the Scriptures (like the Alexandrian Fathers before them), and counterfeited revelations. Fuller adds that they "grieved the Comforter, charging all their sins on God's Spirit, for not effectually assisting them against the same.. sinning on design that their wickedness might be a foil to God's mercy, to set it off the brighter." But that they were Communists, Anarchists, or Libertines, there is no evidence; and the Queen's menial servant who wrote and presented to Parliament an apology for the Service of Love probably complained with justice of their being "defamed with many manner of false reports and lies." This availed nothing, however, against public opinion; and so the Queen commanded by proclamation "that the civil magistrate should be assistant to the ecclesiastical, and that the books should be publicly burnt." The sect, however, long survived the burning of its books.

But already it was not enough to burn books of an unpopular tendency, cruelty against the author being plainly progressive from this time forward to the atrocious penalties afterwards associated with the presence of Laud in the Star Chamber. All our histories tell of John Stubbs, of Lincoln's Inn, who, when his right hand had been cut off for a literary work, with his left hand waved his hat from his head and cried, "Long live the Queen!" The punishment was out of all proportion to

the offence. Men had a right to feel anxious when Elizabeth seemed on the point of marrying the Catholic Duke of Anjou. They remembered the days of Mary, and feared, with reason, the return of Catholicism. Stubbs gave expression to this fear in a work entitled the *Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf whereinto England is like to be swallowed by another French marriage, if the Lord forbid not the banes by letting her Majestie see the sin and punishment thereof* (1579). Page, the disperser of the book, suffered the same penalty as its author.

The book made a great stir and was widely circulated, much to the vexation of the Queen. On September 27th appeared a very long proclamation calling it "a lewd, seditious book.. bolstered up with manifest lies, &c.," and commanding it, wherever found, "to be destroyed (= burnt) in open sight of some public officer." The book itself is written with moderation and respect, if we make allowance for the questionable taste of writing on so delicate a subject at all. It is true that he calls France "a den of idolatry, a kingdom of darkness, confessing Belial and serving Baal"; nor does he spare the personal character of the Duke himself: he only desires that her Majesty may marry with such a house and such a person "as had not provoked the vengeance of the Lord." But plain speaking was needed, and it is possible that the offensive book had something to do with saving the Queen from a great folly and the nation from as great a danger.

Stubbs, one is glad to find, though maimed, was neither disgraced nor disheartened by his misfortune. He learnt to write

with his left hand, and wrote so much better with that than many people with their right, that Lord Burleigh employed him many years afterwards (1587) to compose an answer to Cardinal Allen's work, *A Modest Answer to English Persecutors*. After that I lose sight of Stubbs.

The strong feeling against Episcopacy, which first meets us in works like Fish's *Supplication of Beggars*, or Tyndale's *Practice of Prelates*, and which found vent at last, as a powerful contributory cause, in the Revolution of the seventeenth century, was most clearly pronounced under Elizabeth in the famous tracts known as those of Martin Marprelate; and among these most bitterly in a small work that was burnt by order of the bishops, entitled a *Dialogue wherein is plainly laide open the tyrannical dealing of Lord Bishops against God's Church, with certain points of doctrine, wherein they approve themselves (according to D. Bridges his judgement) to be truly Bishops of the Divell* (1589). This is shown in a sprightly dialogue between a Puritan and a Papist, a jack of both sides, and an Idol (*i. e.*, church) minister, wherein the most is made of such facts as that the Bishop of St. David's was summoned before the High Commission for having two wives living, and that Bishop Culpepper, of Oxford, was fond of hawking and hunting. It is significant that this little tract was reprinted in 1640, on the eve of the Revolution.

I pass now to a book of great political and historical interest: *The Conference about the Succession to the Crown of England* (1594), attributed to Doleman, but really the handiwork of

Parsons, the Jesuit, Cardinal Allen, and others. In the first part, a civil lawyer shows at length that lineal descent and propinquity of blood are not of themselves sufficient title to the Crown; whilst in the second part a temporal lawyer discusses the titles of particular claimants to the succession of Queen Elizabeth. Among these, that of the Earl of Essex, to whom the book was dedicated, is discussed; the object of the book being to baffle the title of King James to the succession, and to fix it either on Essex or the Infanta of Spain. No wonder it gave great offence to the Queen, for it advocated also the lawfulness of deposing her; and it throws some light on those intrigues with the Jesuits which at one time formed so marked an incident in the eventful career of that unfortunate earl. Great efforts were made to suppress it, and there is a tradition that the printer was hanged, drawn, and quartered.

The book itself has played no small part in our history, for not only was Milton's *Defensio* mainly taken from it, but it formed the chief part of Bradshaw's long speech at the condemnation of Charles I. In 1681, when Parliament was debating the subject of the exclusion of the Duke of York from the succession, it was thought well to reprint it; but only two years later it was among the books which had the honour of being condemned to the flames by the University of Oxford, in its famous and loyal book-fire of 1683 (see p. [194](#)).

But if the history of the book was eventful, how much more so was that of its chief author, the famous Robert Parsons, first

of Balliol College, and then of the Order of Jesus! Parsons was a very prince of intrigue. To say that he actually tried to persuade Philip II. to send a second Armada; that he tried to persuade the Earl of Derby to raise a rebellion, and then is suspected of having poisoned him for not consenting; that he instigated an English Jesuit to try to assassinate the Queen; and, among other plans, wished to get the Pope and the Kings of France and Spain to appoint a Catholic successor to Elizabeth, and to support their nominee by an armed confederacy, is to give but the meagre outline of his energetic career. The blacksmith's son certainly made no small use of his time and abilities. His life is the history in miniature of that of his order as a body; that same body whose enormous establishments in England at this day are in such bold defiance of the Catholic Emancipation Act, which makes even their residence in this kingdom illegal.

Doleman's *Conference* was answered in a little book by Peter Wentworth, entitled *A Pithy Exhortation to Her Majesty for establishing her Successor to the Crown*, in which the author advocated the claims of James I. The book was written in terms of great humility and respect, the author not being ignorant, as he quaintly says, "that the anger of a Prince is as the roaring of a Lyon, and even the messenger of Death." But this he was to learn by personal experience, for the Queen, incensed with him for venturing to advise her, not only had his book burnt, but sent him to the Tower, where, like so many others, he died. So at least says a printed slip in the Grenville copy of his book.

But Wentworth is better and more deservedly remembered for his speeches than for his book – his famous speeches in 1575, and again in 1587, in Parliament in defence of the Commons' Right of Free Speech, for both of which he was temporarily committed to the Tower. Rumours of what would please or displease the Queen, or messages from the Queen, like that prohibiting the House to interfere in matters of religion, in those days reduced the voice of the House to a nullity. Wentworth's chief question was, "Whether this Council be not a place for any member of the same here assembled, freely and without control of any person or danger of laws, by bill or speech to utter any of the griefs of this Commonwealth whatsoever, touching the service of God, the safety of the prince and this noble realm." Yet so servile was the House of that period, that on both occasions it disclaimed and condemned its advocate – on the first occasion actually not allowing him to finish his speech. Yet, fortunately, both his speeches live, well reported in the Parliamentary Debates.

To pass from politics to poetry; little as Archbishop Whitgift's proceedings in the High Commission endear his name to posterity, I am inclined to think he may be forgiven for cleansing Stationers' Hall by fire, in 1599, of certain works purporting to be poetical; such works, namely, as Marlowe's *Elegies of Ovid*, which appeared in company with Davies's *Epigrammes*, Marston's *Metamorphosis of Pigmalion's Image*, Hall's *Satires*, and Cutwode's *Caltha Poetarum; or, The Bumble Bee*. The latter is a fantastic poem of 187 stanzas about a bee and a marigold,

and deserved the fire rather for its insipidity than for the reasons which justified the cleansing process applied to the others, the youthful productions of men who were destined to attain celebrity in very different directions of life.

Marlowe, like Shakespeare, from an actor became a writer of plays; but though Ben Jonson extolled his "mighty muse," I doubt whether his *Edward II.*, *Dr. Faustus*, or *Jew of Malta*, are now widely popular. Anthony Wood has left a very disagreeable picture of Marlowe's character, which one would fain hope is overdrawn; but the dramatist's early death in a low quarrel prevented him from ever redeeming his early offences, as a kinder fortune permitted to his companions in the Stationers' bonfire.

Marston came to be more distinguished for his *Satires* than for his plays, his *Scourge of Villainie* being his chief title to fame. Of his *Pigmalion* all that can be said is, that it is not quite so bad as Marlowe's *Elegies*. Warton justly says, with pompous euphemism: "His stream of poetry, if sometimes bright and unpolluted, almost always betrays a muddy bottom." But this muddy bottom is discernible, not in Marston alone, but also in Hall's *Virgidemiarum*, or *Satires*, of which Warton did all he could to revive the popularity. Hall was Marston's rival at Cambridge, but Hall claims to be the first English satirist. He took Juvenal for his model, but the Latin of Juvenal seems to me far less obscure than the English of Hall. I quote two lines to show what this Cambridge student thought of the great Elizabethan



period in which he lived. Referring to some remote golden age, he says: —

"Then men were men; but now the greater part  
Beasts are in life, and women are in heart."

But strange are the evolutions of men. The author of the burnt satires rose from dignity to dignity in the Church. He became successively Bishop of Exeter and Bishop of Norwich, and to this day his devotional works are read by thousands who have never heard of his satires. He was sent as a deputy to the famous Synod of Dort, and was faithful to his Church and king through the Civil War. For this in his old age he suffered sequestration and imprisonment, and he lived to see his cathedral turned into a barrack, and his palace into an ale-house, dying shortly before the Restoration, in 1656, at the age of 82. Bayle thought him worthy of a place in his Dictionary, but he is still worthier of a place in our memories as one of those great English bishops who, like Burnet, Butler, or Tillotson, never put their Church before their humanity, but showed (what needed showing) that the Christianity of the clergy was not of necessity synonymous with the absolute negation of charity.

Davies, too, Marlowe's early friend, rose to fame both as a poet and a statesman. But he began badly. He was disbarred from the Middle Temple for breaking a club over the head of another law student in the very dining-hall. After that he became member

for Corfe Castle, and then successively Solicitor-General and Attorney-General for Ireland. He was knighted in 1607. One of the best books on that unhappy country is his *Discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued, nor brought under obedience of the Crown of England until the beginning of Her Majesty's happy reign* (1611), dedicated to James I. His chief poems are his *Nosce Teipsum* and *The Orchestra*. In 1614 he was elected for Newcastle-under-Lyme, and he died in 1626, aged only 57. Yet in that time he had travelled a long way from the days of his early literary companionship with Christopher Marlowe.

The Church at the end of the sixteenth century assuredly aimed high. At the time the above books were burnt, it was decreed that no satires or epigrams should be printed in the future; and that no plays should be printed without the inspection and permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London! But even this is nothing compared with that later attempt to subject the Press to the Church which called forth Milton's *Areopagitica*

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