

**POLITICAL  
PAMPHLETS**

**SELECTED AND**

**ARRANGED BY**

**A. F. POLLARD**

**THE PAMPHLET LIBRARY**

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**POLITICAL PAMPHLETS**

# POLITICAL PAMPHLETS

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By A. F. POLLARD

*WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND  
EXPLANATORY NOTES*



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## PREFATORY NOTE

TO

### 'THE PAMPHLET LIBRARY'

THE object of *The Pamphlet Library* is to set before readers who are interested in the literary and constitutional history of our country the text of those pamphlets or tractates which, besides possessing the only saving qualities of distinction and style, have also exercised a striking influence upon the current of events. At present four volumes are in contemplation, dealing respectively with pamphlets of political, literary, religious, and dramatic significance, and the editors who have undertaken them have regulated their choice primarily by two considerations. Each pamphlet, it has been held, should have high literary qualities, and should also mark a distinct change or development of taste or standpoint. Unfortunately, the pamphleteer of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not always as brief as he was effective, and the restrictions of space have obliged the omission of some

polemical articles which might possibly have been included with advantage. It is hoped, however, that by means of excerpt and footnote no pamphlet of the first importance has been altogether neglected; and the editors of the various volumes explain in their introductions the reason and the limit of their selections. Concerning the value of the Pamphlet and the expediency of its recension, Dr Johnson himself will be found discoursing with pregnancy and wit in Mr Ernest Rhys's Literary Collection, and his strenuous sentences are more than sufficient argument in favour of the present enterprise. For, indeed, Reform is the child of Controversy, and the most effectual arrows in the quiver of Controversy are those of a country's Press. Before the day of the clamouring newspaper, the Pamphlet was the leader of popular taste, so that in a study of these fugitive pieces we may see the features of an Age, as in a glass, may mark its expression, and understand its tendency. As some such footnote to history the following papers have been collected. How far they may prove of value it rests with others to decide.

A. W.

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## INTRODUCTION

THE first difficulty that meets the editor of a selection of political pamphlets is the need of arriving at some definition of what a pamphlet, and particularly a political pamphlet, is. The word itself is of some antiquity; it occurs in the *Philobiblon* of Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham, who died in 1345. But its etymology is involved in obscurity; Myles Davies, who published in 1715 a work called *Icon Libellorum: or, A Critical History of Pamphlets*, gives four different derivations, none of which would satisfy the requirements of modern philology. Indeed, the only thing certain about the word seems to be that it has always been considered equivalent to the Latin 'libellus' and to have meant a 'little book.' As to the contents of the political pamphlet, a definition of their nature must, like most definitions, be approximate rather than exact. It is impossible, for instance, to draw a hard and fast rule between the pamphlet and the essay or treatise on political



philosophy. It is of the essence of a political pamphlet that it should have an immediate and specific political purpose; it seeks to influence opinion and win votes in view of a particular question; it appeals to the man in the street rather than to the man in the study, to the many rather than to the few; it requires an extensive and rapid circulation, and hence it must be cheap in price and moderate in bulk. To the treatise on political philosophy, popularity is a matter of comparative indifference; its nature is theoretical rather than practical, and it seeks to influence thought rather than action. Its object is in a sense political: Locke furnished a philosophical basis for the political dogmas of the Whigs, Hobbes and Filmer attempted a similar service for the Tories, but no one would call the *Essay on Toleration*, *Civil Government*, the *Leviathan* or the *De Patriarcha* a political pamphlet. The distinction is not always so clear; no treatise on political philosophy is richer in that science than Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*; no book ever appealed more strongly to the student of politics. Yet it is a political pamphlet; it sought a single definite political object—the overthrow of the French Revolution; and if, incidentally, it lays down profound

political maxims, if, by way of illustration, it appeals to the broadest political truths,\* it proves not that it is not a political pamphlet, but that it is a great one.

Still more blurred and indistinct are the lines which separate the political from the ecclesiastical or religious pamphlet on the one hand and the literary pamphlet on the other. Some of the greatest pamphlets are political in one aspect and literary in another; others are at the same time political and ecclesiastical. Milton's *Areopagitica* deals with a great political question, the freedom of the press. No less political was the question of toleration and the civil status of dissenters, which produced some of the finest pamphlets in the language; such are Defoe's *Shortest way with Dissenters*, Halifax's *Letter to a Dissenter* and *Anatomy of an Equivalent*, and Swift's *Sentiments of a Church of England man*. But it is easy to carry this principle of definition too far; almost every question has a political aspect, and by a little ingenuity the term 'political' can be made to cover every pamphlet in the language. It belongs more properly to those only in which the political is the sole or at least the predominant element.

It will be at once apparent that the existence of the political pamphlet is subject to certain conditions which can only be obtained in certain stages of political, social, and intellectual development. It is essentially a means of popularising political thought and stimulating political action in masses of men, and there is obviously no function for it in a state where political power is engrossed in the hands of one or of the few. Its existence therefore presupposes a certain amount of constitutional freedom. Intellectual progress is no less indispensable; pamphlets could be of little use until a certain proportion of the people were able to read them, and there could be few pamphlets at all before the existence of a printing press. As we have seen the word dates from a time when the only means of popularising a work consisted in making numerous manuscript copies, or in putting the idea in the form of political songs which could easily be remembered. Perhaps no pamphlet ever produced such an effect as John Ball's rhymed couplet—  
"When Adam delved and Evè span, who  
was then the gentleman?" and the number of manuscript copies made of Richard Rolle's mystical works would probably be considered

a fair circulation for a printed book to-day. Yet such means can scarcely be said to have adequately filled the place of a printing press. Nor was Gutenberg's invention at once followed by a development of political pamphleteering. The dominant interest in the sixteenth century was anything rather than political; and the printing press devoted itself first to the revival of classical learning and then to the religious discussions which followed the Reformation. Pamphlets took a religious, literary, and dramatic form before they entered on the domain of politics; the Marprelate tracts (1588), the *Defence of Poesie* (1581), and Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (1612) are all prior to the publication of any political pamphlet of note. It was not till the popular acquiescence in the strong national government of the Tudors was succeeded by revolt against the feeble dynastic policy of the Stuarts, that interest in politics became dominant in national life. The long contest between king and parliament drew literature into its vortex, and from it emerged the political pamphlet.

The floodgates of political writing were now opened, but the volume of political pamphlets that covered the country was

remarkable for quantity rather than quality. During the Civil War, news-sheets like the *Mercurius Politicus*, *Mercurius Aulicus* and *Mercurius Britannicus* made their appearance; of the number of pamphlets more strictly so-called some idea may be gained by turning over the collection of 'King's Pamphlets' in the British Museum, by a glance through the ten volumes of selections called the 'Somers Tracts' and the similar 'Harleian Miscellany,' or even by consulting Maseres' 'Select Tracts relating to the Civil War.' Prynne alone published two hundred books and pamphlets, and a less known predecessor, Thomas Scot, was fairly prolific; few of his pamphlets can be certainly traced to him, but those few number between forty and fifty. Most of these pamphlets are of a very ephemeral character and there are few that do not merit the oblivion that has enveloped them. One or two like Prynne's *Canterburies Doome*, Heylyn's *Cyprianus Anglicus*, Vicars's *Burning Bush* and *God's Ark*, and Bishop Gauden's 'Εικων βασιλική, which passed through forty-seven editions, have a permanent historical interest, but it is not due to their literary value. Others, like the tracts of Hugh Peters, derive importance from the political

part played by their authors. But the majority of writers are, like Tobie Venner and Marchamont Nedham, as obscure as their works, though the latter was in 1649 paid £50 by the Council of State for his *Case of the Commonwealth State*. Even Andrew Marvell's pamphlets are forgotten, though in his own age his reputation rested mainly on them, and Swift thought they entitled him to be considered a great genius. One name indeed, that of John Milton, stands out from the herd of pamphleteers, and some of his pamphlets have become permanent additions to English literature. There is but one other production of the commonwealth, *Killing No Murder*, that has escaped oblivion.

The Restoration and consequent suppression of the freedom of the press caused a temporary lull in political writing, but it was only the prelude to the golden age of pamphleteering which extended from the Revolution to the close of the eighteenth century. The final transference of political power to the House of Commons, and through it to the constituencies, corrupt and limited though they were, at once put a high value on the political writer, and the rise of the two great parties, Whig and Tory, opened a ready market for his wares. At the same

time the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695 removed the greatest obstacle to the development of pamphleteering. Newspapers like the *London Post*, the *Flying Post*, the *Postboy*, the *Postman*, and a host of others, made their appearance, and side by side with newspapers, political pamphlets grew in importance. Pamphleteers were no longer obscure hacks, ready to sell their pen to the highest bidder, but the foremost statesmen and greatest men of letters in the land. Halifax was followed by Defoe, Swift, Steele, Addison, Arbuthnot, Bolingbroke, and Burke, and they carried on the line of great pamphleteers till pamphleteering was supplanted by other forms of political literature and other methods of political warfare.

It is hard to understand the neglect that has overtaken the literary productions of George Savile, Marquis of Halifax. Ranke calls him 'one of the finest pamphleteers that have ever lived,' and Mackintosh considered his *Letter to a Dissenter* 'the finest specimen of occasional literature extant.' No contemporary writing illustrates better the politics of the time, and few pamphleteers have made keener observations on events passing around them or treated them in so philosophic and scientific a spirit; while his terseness of expression and pointedness of

phrase have rarely been excelled. Yet none of his pamphlets seem to have been reprinted in any selection of political tracts, and with the exception of some extracts in Mr Henry Craik's *English Prose Selections* they are inaccessible to the majority of readers. Defoe has met with more worthy recognition, partly because of his eminence in other branches of literature and partly, perhaps, because his *Shortest Way with Dissenters* gained him the distinction of the pillory—a distinction which he converted into a triumph by his *Hymn to the Pillory*. He wrote two hundred and fifty-four works, and his best known political piece is probably his *True-born Englishman*, published in 1701. The other great Whig pamphleteer of Queen Anne's reign was Steele, whose *Crisis* is one of the best known pamphlets in English literature. But the genius of Defoe and Steele paled their ineffectual fires before that of their great antagonist Swift, 'without exception the most effective political writer in England at a time when political writing was of transcendent importance.'<sup>1</sup> Brought up with Whig prepossessions as secretary to Sir William Temple, Swift as a high churchman naturally gravitated towards the Tories during the reign

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, *Hist. of England*, ed. 1892, i. 197.



of Queen Anne. Never did publicist render any party such yeoman service as Swift rendered the Tories, and rarely did anyone meet with such scant rewards. More than anything else, his *Conduct of the Allies* made the peace of Utrecht acceptable to the nation, and if anything could have saved his party from the fifty years' exclusion from office which befell them on the accession of George I., the loyal adoption of the advice he offered in his *Free Thoughts on the Present State of Affairs* would have done it. That advice was rejected; the Whigs monopolised office for half a century, and Swift retired to his deanery in Dublin. There he threw in his lot with his Irish countrymen, and for the first time in history made the cause of Ireland heard even in England in pamphlets of unrivalled sarcasm, wit, and invective.

He left the field in England to Steele, Defoe, Arbuthnot, Addison, and a host of smaller fry like Oldmixon. Many of them are great names in literature, but rather in the character of essayists than of pamphleteers, and they mainly confined their political writing to periodicals like the *Old Whig*, the *Plebeian*, the *Whig Examiner*, and others. With them the generation of Queen Anne's pamphleteers died out. They were succeeded by a group

of writers who made the *Craftsman* a terror to Walpole's government, but whose names have been completely overshadowed by that of Bolingbroke, one of the most extraordinary characters in English history. Brilliant as a statesman, he had overturned the ministry of Godolphin and Marlborough when covered with glory, and carried with unexampled address the peace of Utrecht. Then, undermining his rival Harley, he succeeded as first minister of the crown, only to find his position ruined and his schemes wrecked by the death of the queen four days later. Dazzling as an orator, Chatham declared that he would rather recover one of Bolingbroke's orations than the lost books of Livy, or all the gaps in Greek and Roman lore; while as a pamphleteer he has been declared by an eminent living critic<sup>1</sup> to rank only below the three or four highest masters of English prose. Driven into exile on the accession of George I., he took office under the Pretender, but when the rebellion of 1715 failed, he sought to make his peace with the king and secured it by the gift of eleven thousand pounds to George's mistress, the Duchess of Kendal. Returning to England, he organised the opposition to

<sup>1</sup> John Morley, *Walpole*, p. 79.

Walpole, and united under his leadership discontented Whigs like Carteret and Pulteney, and honest Tories like Wyndham and Shippen. He made the pages of the *Craftsman* the vehicle for the bitter and effective attacks on Walpole which gradually sapped the minister's power. It was Walpole's cue to represent all Tories as Jacobites; Bolingbroke retorted with his *State of Parties at the Accession of George I.*, in which he strove by skilful misrepresentation to prove that he and his colleagues had never entertained any idea of overturning the Hanoverian succession. But his greatest pamphlet was his *Idea of a Patriot King*, 'a work important equally as a historical document and as a model of style. Chesterfield said that until he read that tract he did not know what the English language was capable of.'<sup>1</sup> His theory was that 'the power and prerogative of the sovereign should be greatly enlarged as the only efficient check upon the corruption of Parliament.'<sup>2</sup> It set up an ideal of a patriot king who would govern independently of all parties and particularly of the Whigs, by means of the ablest ministers, especially Bolingbroke and his friends. It

<sup>1</sup> E. J. Payne, *Select Works of Burke*, vol. i. pp. xvi., xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Lecky, *Hist. of England*, i. 272.

was intended for the instruction of the heir apparent, Frederick Lewis, who was in chronic opposition to his father, and upon it were modelled to some extent the political ideas of George III. To its influence has been traced the loss of the American colonies, and the postponement of Catholic Emancipation; the affiliation is fanciful, but there is no doubt that it tended to enhance George III.'s ideas of the royal prerogative which had no small share in producing the evils of his reign.

What those evils were is vividly portrayed in the writings of that pseudonymous entity whom Burke termed the 'prince of pamphleteers.' Whoever the writer may have been who concealed his personality under the name of Junius — and the evidence points decisively in favour of Sir Philip Francis—his literary merits were of the highest order, and his letters have become a classic in English literature. 'No writer ever excelled Junius in condensed and virulent invective, rendered all the more malignant by the studied and controlled deliberation of the language, in envenomed and highly elaborated sarcasm, in clear and vivid statement; in the art of assuming, though an unknown individual, an attitude of great moral and political superiority:

in the art of evading difficulties, insinuating unproved charges, imputing unworthy motives. His letters are perfectly adapted to the purposes for which they were intended. There is nothing in them superfluous or obscure, and nothing that fails to tell. He had to the highest degree the gift of saying things that are remembered, and his epigrams are often barbed with the keenest wit.<sup>1</sup> They are the work of a man who was a practical politician first and a man of letters afterwards, and his writings are distinguished by a political sagacity and precision of criticism which only a close acquaintance with the practice of politics can give. His motives indeed were not of a high order; personal spite entered largely into them, and many of his letters were written merely to revenge real or fancied wrongs. He hated most of the ministers of his time, and he stopped at nothing in the 'measured malignity of slander' with which he assailed them. Above all he hated the king, and he did not hesitate to insinuate that the king was a coward, not because it was true, but because he knew that the king, who was unmoved by any other charge, would not 'eat meat for a week' after being taunted with lack of courage.

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, *Hist. of England*, iii. 451.

Nor is Junius in any way in advance of his age: keen as his judgment is on many immediate political issues, his letters 'contain no original views, no large generalizations, no proofs of political prescience, no great depth or power of thought;' and the task of elaborating a rival political theory to that of the *Patriot King* was left to his great contemporary Burke.

In the whole scope of political literature there is no writer so often read or so frequently quoted in the present day, and none whose influence has been so deep and lasting, as that of Edmund Burke. It is not merely because of his eloquence or literary style, nor because of the theory of the constitution which he opposed to that of the *Patriot King*, and which was for a century the favourite dogma of conservative statesmen. Nor is it because of the insight with which he treated current political questions; it is neither due to the fact that he urged conciliation with America nor to the fact that he preached war to the death against Revolutionary France. It is because he never touched a subject without adorning it with reflections that go to the root of the principles of government in all ages and all nations. Many of these reflec-

tions have become the commonplaces of politics; though as common sense is one of the rarest of qualities, so the commonplaces of politics are often deemed those which may be most safely neglected. *I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people* is one of these maxims. *The people have no interest in disorder. When they do wrong, it is their error and not their crime* is another; *whenever a separation is made between liberty and justice neither is in my opinion safe* is a third; and they abound in every pamphlet and every speech from the *Present Discontents* to the *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*.

In Burke political writing reached its highest development. His *Reflections on the French Revolution* had perhaps a greater immediate effect than any other pamphlet, for except the execution of Louis XVI. nothing did so much to precipitate war between England and France; and it called forth two famous answers—Paine's *Rights of Man* and Mackintosh's *Vindiciae Gallicae*. Erskine's '*Causes and Consequences of the War with France*,' which appeared in 1797, and ran through forty-eight editions, was a reply to Burke's *Regicide Peace*. But from this time the art of political pam-

phleteering progressively declined. Cobbett was a prolific pamphleteer, and Carlyle wrote *Latter Day Pamphlets*, but the vigorous style of the former is little justification for placing him in the same class with the giants of the eighteenth century, and the latter essays scarcely come within the definition of a political pamphlet. Such as they are they are but exceptions to the general decay of pamphleteering. The reasons for which are fairly obvious. The function of the pamphlet as a means of popularising political thought and influencing political opinion is now performed by a multitude of quarterly, monthly, weekly, and daily periodicals. Colonel Sexby might experience some difficulty in persuading an editor to publish his advocacy of political assassination, but a modern Halifax would find a fitting medium for his counsels of political perfection in the pages of the *Spectator*. A latter-day Swift would thunder against the enemies of the church in the columns of the *Times*; a Burke would denounce the infamy of a regicide peace in monthly contributions to the *Nineteenth Century*, while Junius's Letters would be printed amid harmonious surroundings as paragraphs in *Truth*. Through the medium of the daily press the politician



from the front benches in parliament, or from the most distant provincial platform, appeals to a wider audience than ever did the pamphleteer. But it would be idle to deny that the presentation of political thought has suffered by the change. It is almost a truism that a speech to read well must be a bad one. The tendency is all towards discouraging set orations, and without elaborate preparation there can be no literary finish. Equally fatal to political writing has been the pace at which men live in the nineteenth century: the quarterly review has been supplanted by the monthly, the monthly by the weekly, and the weekly by the daily press, which, in its turn, is threatened by the evening paper, which publishes its second edition at ten o'clock in the morning and prints another every hour till late in the afternoon. Political discussion is sacrificed to the passion for news; pamphlets are superseded by paragraphs, and head lines do duty for arguments. To parody the words of the greatest and last of the great pamphleteers, the age of the pamphlet is gone, that of the stump-orator and writer of occasional notes has succeeded, and the glory of political writing is extinguished for ever.

In making a selection from the political

literature thus roughly sketched, it is manifest that difficulty arises rather from a wealth than from a dearth of material. The choice must be largely a matter of personal preference, though to others individual taste is apt to appear arbitrary and capricious, and the result a thing of shreds and patches. Nevertheless at least one canon may be laid down without fear of contradiction; no pamphlet has been included that does not possess a permanent literary as well as a permanent historical interest. It is not sufficient that a pamphlet should record historical facts not otherwise known, be they never so important; it must also embody literary qualities of a high order. It would have been easy to select a dozen or a score of tracts from the Somers and Harleian Collections, but the result would not have repaid perusal by any but minute historical students. A more serious difficulty is presented by the mechanical limits of space. Of the greatest political pamphlets not a few would severally occupy volumes far exceeding the present in bulk; such are Swift's *Conduct of the Allies*, Bolingbroke's *Idea of a Patriot King*, Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution*, and Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, while Halifax's *Character of a Trimmer*,

Steele's *Crisis* and each of Burke's *Letters on a Regicide Peace* would cover half the present volume; even the latter's *Letter to a Noble Lord*—the most splendid repartee in the language—would fill a quarter of its pages. It thus becomes a question of omitting them altogether and falling back on shorter pamphlets or offering merely extracts; the former alternative has with one or two exceptions, noted below, been adopted.

The pamphlets have generally been arranged in chronological order, and a short note has been prefixed to each detailing the circumstances of its publication. The first is the dedication of Sexby's *Killing No Murder*, the title of which has become a household word. The pamphlet itself is an exercise on the well-worn classical theme of tyrannicide eked out by copious references to Aristotle; its length is considerable, and in literary distinction it falls far below the dedication which is an admirable specimen of ironical writing. Then follow two pamphlets by Halifax, and if the space allotted to them is somewhat disproportionate, the excess may be forgiven in an attempt to redress an unmerited neglect and rescue from obscurity some of the works of a most original and admirable political pam-

phleteer. The fourth pamphlet here reprinted, *The Art of Political Lying*, is somewhat different in character, being satirical rather than controversial in character. The next three, Steele's *Crisis*, Swift's *Thoughts upon the Present State of Affairs*, and Bolingbroke's *State of Parties at the Accession of George I.*, all deal with the question of the Hanoverian Succession. Only the dedication of Steele's *Crisis* has been reprinted partly because the pamphlet itself is long and partly because it consists largely in a recitation of acts of Parliament, which do not illustrate Steele's style and would probably be found wearisome by the modern reader. The dedication is at once a good example of Steele's literary art and an illustration of his object and point of view. The other two need no apology, as they are among the best of the writings of their respective authors. The last has been printed slightly out of chronological order because of its intimate connection with the other two. Swift's *Fourth Drapier's Letter* is the best of his Irish pamphlets. The three letters of Junius that follow are equally representative. The first opens the series, the second is a typical instance of the methods with which he assailed prominent men of the day, and

the third addressed to the king created most excitement of them all. Next comes the first part of Burke's *Thoughts on Present Discontents*, and the volume closes with the peroration of his *Third Letter on a Regicide Peace*.

The decision to print extracts from Burke has not been reached without a struggle and a shudder at the Philistinism of such a proceeding. A competent critic has affirmed that the only specimen of Burke is 'all that he wrote.'<sup>1</sup> But the true lover of art will prefer a torso of Pheidias to all the statues on the Embankment, and no critic of taste will stigmatize the choice of a few fragments from Burke before half a dozen complete tracts of Nedham or Cobbett. Moreover, the design of the present volume is to stimulate, not to surfeit the appetite; to vary the metaphor, it professes merely to offer a few samples with a view to increasing the demand for more. Thanks to the long enjoyment of a free constitution and to a liberty broadening down through centuries from precedent to precedent, the collection of English political pamphlets is unique. No other nation can pretend to rival us in that branch of literature; and the object of this volume will be more than fulfilled if

<sup>1</sup> Hazlitt.

it induces a reader here and there to dip more deeply into this mine of wealth, and study some of those political pamphlets which, written with an immediate and even transitory political purpose, are yet, like the immortal history of Thucydides, κτήματα ἐς ἀεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγωνίσματα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, bk. i. cp. 22: 'everlasting possessions, not prize compositions which are heard and forgotten.' (Jowett's translation.)