

Utopias, but he loved liberty passionately, he consecrated to her defence his entire life, with an elevation of spirit, a generosity of soul, which distinguished him from all his compatriots and all his contemporaries. He is worthy of being numbered with the precursors of our eighteenth century, and his writings offer to the historian and the philosopher the curious and sublime spectacle of a new society commencing to be born.¹

But if Milton's main purpose in writing this attack on tyranny was to lay down the program of constitutional liberty, his secondary aim was to chastise his former friends the Presbyterians, and to pour out the bitterest vials of his wrath upon their inconsistent divines. The controversial character of his treatise is indeed very marked. Stern calls the acrimonious attack on the Presbyterians the shell of the pamphlet, of which the abstract argument on the origin of government, and the right to depose and punish a tyrant, is the kernel.² According to the *Second Defence* (Bohn 1. 260), it was the inconsistent conduct of the ministers which impelled Milton to write this exposure of their inconstancy and effrontery. Not only as the greatest opponents of his goddess, Liberty, but as his own personal foes, did Milton eagerly embrace the opportunity to reveal their various shortcomings of thought and life. In a sermon preached before the Houses of Parliament in 1644 by the Rev. Herbert Palmer, Milton's tractate on divorce had been openly called 'a wicked booke which deserves to be burnt.'³ The Westminster Assembly, displeased from the same

¹ *Étude sur les pamphlets Politiques et Religieux de Milton*, pp. 224, 225.

² *Milton und seine Zeit* 1. 441.

³ *The Glasse of God's Providence towards his Faithfull Ones*. A Sermon preached before the Houses of Parlt., Aug. 13, 1644.