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The Pope as Arsonist and Christian Salvation: Peter Causton's *Londini Conflagratio: Carmen*

2016 saw the 350th anniversary of the so-called Fire of London in 1666, which destroyed much of the city centre during a major conflagration from 2 to 6 September 1666.¹ Although according to official records the loss of life was minimal (rather surprising in view of a fire of that scale),² there was initially a great risk to life; the destruction of buildings was enormous, and this essentially wiped out medieval London. Particularly because the Fire was such a serious incident, investigations into its causes were launched not long afterwards, and various theories began to appear. The modern view, which can already be found in letters and diary entries of contemporary eyewitnesses,³ is that the Fire started in the bakery of Thomas Farrinor in Pudding Lane (near London Bridge); presumably the fire in the oven had not been fully extinguished overnight, though the baker denied that. At any rate, the blaming of scapegoats soon started, especially in the context of a difficult political and religious situation, including the Anglo-Dutch Wars (the second of which was only concluded by the Treaty of Breda in 1667) and continuous tensions between Protestants and Roman Catholics.⁴ Thus, one

1 An account of the Fire is provided e.g. in Porter 1996; a more narrative description is offered by Weiss 2012. A collection of extracts from contemporaries, illustrating the spread of the Fire, reactions to it and the stages of the rebuilding of the city, can be found in Milne 1986; an overview and discussion of how the space of London is presented in a variety of documents dealing with the destruction and rebuilding is given in Wall 1998.

2 According to official records only four people lost their lives. But John Evelyn (1620–1706) mentions ‘the stench that came from some poor creatures’ bodies’ in his *Diary* (7 September 1666). – See also Jeremiah Wells, *On the Rebuilding of London*, ll. 9–12: ‘What were the Trophies of triumphant Fate / By frequent Tombs in the Ch.yards was shown: / But all those thick-set Monu’ments which so late / Were Other’s Sepulchers are now their Own.’ (Aubin 1943, 123).

3 See Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), *Diary* (2 September 1666): ‘So down, with my heart full of trouble, to the Lieutenant of the Tower, who tells me that it began this morning in the King’s baker’s’ house in Pudding-lane, ...’ (<http://www.pepys.info/1666/1666sep.html>); Letter by Thomas Smith (13 September 1666): ‘The fire began in a Baker’s House below London Bridge on Saturday night, & ceased upon Wednesday night.’ (<http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/486146.html>).

4 On the different ‘explanations’ for the Fire, the relationship between evidence and rumour and the development in the public imagination see Dolan 2001; Harris 2005, 79–80, 150–1 (on providence seen as responsible for the Fire, see Kingsley 1999).

group suspected of being responsible were the Dutch and the allied French.⁵ Another group held to be behind the Fire were Roman Catholics ('Papists'), especially Jesuits;⁶ this can be seen, for instance, from evidence such as the 1667 publication *Pyrotechnica Loyolana, Ignatian Fire-works*⁷ as well as a commemorative inscription set up on the site of the bakery in Pudding Lane in 1681 (removed later)⁸ and part of an inscription added to the Monument, erected in London in 1671–7 to commemorate the Fire, in 1681 (removed in 1830, after the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829)⁹ and even a declaration of the House of Commons in 1681, that 'it is the opinion of this House that the City of London was burnt in the year 1666 by the Papists; designing thereby to introduce arbitrary power and popery into this Kingdom'.¹⁰

5 See Samuel Pepys (1633–1703), *Diary* (5 September 1666): 'There, when I come, I find the gates shut, but no guard kept at all, which troubled me, because of discourse now begun, that there is plot in it, and that the French had done it. ... And I lay down and slept a good night about midnight, though when I rose I heard that there had been a great alarme of French and Dutch being risen, which proved, nothing.' (<http://www.pepys.info/1666/1666sep.html>); John Evelyn (1620–1706), *Diary* (7 September 1666): 'In the midst of all this calamity and confusion, there was, I know not how, an alarm begun that the French and Dutch, with whom we were now in hostility were not only landed, but even entering the city. There was, in truth, some days before, great suspicion of those two nations joining; and now that they had been the occasion of firing the town. This report did so terrify, that on a sudden there was such an uproar and tumult that they ran from their goods, and, taking what weapons they could come at, they could not be stopped from falling on some of those nations whom they casually met, without sense or reason.' – See also John Crouch, *Londinenses Lacrymæ*, ll. 49–50: 'This dreadful Fire first seiz'd a narrow Lane, / As if the Dutch or French had laid a Train.' (Aubin 1943, 48); *The Londoners Lamentation*, ll. 91–6: *Of French and Dutch many were took; / (upon suspition of a Plot, / That they this ruine should provoke / with Fire-works) which will all be brought / Unto their tryal, but I fear, / Our sinful hearts more guilty are.*' (Aubin 1943, 87–8).

6 See Porter 1996, 170–4.

7 *Pyrotechnica Loyolana, Ignatian Fire-works. Or, the Fiery Jesuits Temper and Behaviour. Being an Historical Compendium of the Rise, Increase, Doctrines, and Deeds of the Jesuits. Exposed to the Publick view for the sake of London. By a Catholick-Christian.* London 1667 (available via Early English Books Online). – Among other illustrations, the frontispiece shows the pope, sitting on a throne and wearing a tiara, as he operates bellows to strengthen the fire in London.

8 See <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/online/object/119401.html>.

9 See <http://www.themonument.info/history/inscriptions.html>; see also Dolan 2001, 395–401.

10 See Porter 1996, 173 (after *Commons' Journal*, vol. 9, p. 703). – Immediately after the event, the Parliamentary committee investigating the Fire merely compiled evidence (Porter 1996, 86); the investigation by the Privy Council concluded: 'Nothing yet hath been found to argue it to have been other than the hand of God upon us, a great wind, and the season so dry' (quoted from Weiss 2012, 103).

Of the vast array of reactions to the Fire of London, some take the form of poetic treatments.¹¹ Among these the hardly known (and hitherto untranslated) Latin poem by Peter Causton is of particular interest since it may have been composed soon after the Fire and presents a specific interpretation of the event.¹² Peter Causton's poem was allegedly written as a new year's gift for 'R. V.' (addressed as 'Ralph' in the poem) on 1 January 1667¹³ and was published towards the end of 1689 in a collection of the author's *Tria carmina*.¹⁴ Peter Causton is identified as 'Merc. Lond.' on the collection's title page and in the headings of the other poems and was apparently a timber merchant in London;¹⁵ he was probably the brother

11 The most famous item is probably John Dryden's (1631–1700) *Annus mirabilis* of 1667 (available e.g. at: <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A36598.0001.001>). – A selection of poems in English is provided in Aubin 1943.

12 For other poems in Latin see Simon Ford, *Conflagratio Londinensis Poetice Depicta* (1667), *Londini quod reliquum* (1667), *Actio in Londini incendiarios* (1667) and *Londini renascentis imago poetica* (1668), collected in: *Poemata Londinensia, Jam tandem consummata, et In unum Volumen redacta*, London 1668 [available on Early English Books Online and held at the Museum of London: ID no. 42.39/80; for English versions of his poems see Aubin 1943, 3–19, 93–105, 134–50]; William Smith, *De urbis Londini incendio elegia* (1667) [available on Early English Books Online and held at the Museum of London: ID no. 42.39/55a]; [Jeremiah Wells], *In Londini incendium*, in his *Poems upon Divers Occasions* (1667, pp. 46–9) [available on Early English Books Online; see also an English poem, reprinted in Aubin 1943, 122–33]; *In tristissimum immanissimumque urbis Londinensis nonas circiter Sept. – LXVI incendium. Carmen lugubre* [available on Early English Books Online]; Joshua Barnes (1654–1712), *Upon the Fire of London, and the Plague, a Latin Poem, in Heroic Verse* (1679). – As Latin poems on the Fire of London Aubin (1943, xv n. 24) lists the pieces given in this note (but not the poem by Peter Causton). He adds another item, but this seems to be a poem in praise of London and not specifically connected with the Fire: *Londinum, Heroico Carmine Perlufratum, Per Johannem Adamum Transylvanum, Dedicatumq; Literarum, Peregrinorum, virtutumq; Patronis. The Renovnd City of London, Surveyed and Illustrated, In a Latine Poem, By J. Adamus a Transylvanian. And tranſlated into Engliſh By W.F. of Grays-Inn J.C. Dedicated To the Patrons of Strangers, Learning, and ingenuity*. London, Printed by J.R. for the Author. 1670 [available on Early English Books Online].

13 The poem is dated to the Calends of January in 1666/7: this way of indicating the date takes account of the fact that in Britain the New Year still officially started in March at that time, while it was common to use double dating to acknowledge different starting dates of the year in different calendar systems.

14 Copies of the work are now held in the British Library and the Museum of London (ID no. 42.39/87). The British Library copy is accessible via Early English Books Online. – I am grateful to staff and volunteers at the Museum of London, especially Meriel Jeater, for providing a transcription of the text in their copy. – The Latin text given in the appendix has been taken from Early English Books Online and reproduces the presentation of the poem in this edition as closely as possible. An English translation follows the Latin text.

15 See a record at the National Archives (ADM 106/332/63) in Kew in southwest London (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C12700251>).

of John Causton, a citizen and weaver of London. Peter Causton died on 25 November 1700; his will dates from 19 July 1699 and was proved on 3 January 1700.¹⁶ He wrote at least the three poems included in the collection (*De Conflagratione Londini; In Laudem Holandiæ; Tunbrigalia, Editio Tertia*). The dedicatee of the piece on the Fire of London is presumably Ralph Venning (c. 1622–1674), a clergyman who had studied at Cambridge and was later active in London, preaching and publishing sermons and devotional works; under the Act of Uniformity in 1662 he, as a Nonconformist, was ejected.¹⁷ Thus, this remarkable piece of Neo-Latin poetry was written by a merchant (fluent in Latin) and addressed to a learned and persecuted church official; accordingly, it is also a document of contemporary religious conflicts.

The collection of Peter Causton's *Tria carmina* opens with an *Epistola Dedicatoria*, entitled *P. Causton Philo-Musis Anglo-Britannis salutem*. Thus, although towards the end the writer speaks of the *tenuitas* of his poems in mock-modesty, this opening suggests that he is aiming for a learned national audience. Moreover, he adds, with a Horatian tag, that the effort of writing the poems is worth it if they educate or please (cf. Hor. *Ars P.* 333–4; 343–4). For the poem on the Fire of London Peter Causton hopes, again in mock-modesty, that it will contribute to preserving the memory of the city's calamity among posterity. About the genesis of the piece he says that it had been written some time ago and that he is only publishing it now upon the request of friends, since he had hesitated for fear of offending anyone.¹⁸ Accordingly, he insists that he merely identifies the authors of the Fire in agreement with the official view of King, Parliament and the general population and that he has taken all facts from his own autopsy or from assured and trustworthy sources. Yet, he continues, he should be excused for adding some poetic flavour in the manner of Vergil and Horace, quoting *ficta voluptatis*

¹⁶ The probate will of Peter Causton dating to 1701 is held at the London Metropolitan Archives (ACC/2914/001) in the City of London (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/9c0fee3b-6aaa-4e17-ab4f-42d22392e2fe>).

¹⁷ See S. Wright, 'Venning, Ralph', *ODNB* online. – The Act of Uniformity of 1662, an element of the so-called Clarendon Code, required all clergymen to follow the liturgy of the established Church of England. Those who did not comply were expelled from the Church of England. The Five Mile Act of 1665 forbade clergymen from living within five miles of a parish from which they had been expelled, so as to ensure conformity of the established Church of England (see e.g. Harris 2005, 52–3).

¹⁸ There is no external evidence to corroborate or falsify what the author says about the poem's publication history. At any rate there does not seem to be any noticeable influence from other poems on the Fire of London. If the dates are accepted, there is still the question of whether the poem printed in 1689 is the original version or whether any changes to the text may have been made since the poem was first written.

causâ fînt proxima veris from Horace's *Ars poetica* (338). So, Peter Causton makes it clear from the start that this piece will be a 'factual' description in poetic format and also indicates that the presentation might be controversial, which he seeks to justify in advance.

Indeed, in contrast to other poems on the Fire, the piece by Peter Causton is an analysis combined with a sketch of the developments during the Fire rather than a detailed chronological description focusing on the plight of individuals. At the same time it uses standard classical imagery, such as similes of ships, metonymical references to pagan gods or metaphorical descriptions of days and of sunrise or sunset. Still, the character of the presentation as a whole is more 'factual' than poetic. That is a result of the aspects selected for emphasis (e.g. the inclusion of practical details of fire-fighting) as well as of the fact that there are fewer reminiscences of Vergil than one might expect, no obvious comparison with the fate of Troy or Roman history (as is common in other poems on this incident), few emotional exclamations by the poet and no praise of the city, its institutions or its inhabitants. Yet the choice of the metre of the hexameter, the employment of metaphors, the dramatization by means of direct speech and the use of names of classical gods still serve to create an epic atmosphere.

As a poem written in place of a New Year's gift,¹⁹ the piece is an example of Neo-Latin occasional poetry, although there are no further references to the occasion or to the personal relationship between author and addressee after the introduction. The long poem starts with a short introduction to the dedicatee Ralph (1–8) and a brief reference to the poet's earlier poem about the Netherlands (9–10), which follows in the collection. After stating the theme and his sadness at the destruction of the city (10–15), the poet turns to the Muse in classical fashion and asks her to reveal the person responsible for the fire (16–18).

The poem then does not continue with the identification of an individual, but describes with ancient metonymic imagery how Vulcan first attacked Pudding Lane (19–21). Still, the fire could have been extinguished, it is added, if action had been taken immediately (21–3). It is noted that the 'consul' and 'praetors' (i.e. the Mayor and aldermen) were present, but that the gods and the fates were opposed, that nocturnal Iacchus had darkened their minds and wise Minerva had fled the city (23–30). Indeed, the Lord Mayor, Sir Thomas Bloodworth (1620–1682; Lord Mayor of London from Oct. 1665 to Oct. 1666), hesitated to destroy houses in

¹⁹ Precedents for offering pieces of writing as New Year's gifts exist: for instance, in 1546 the young Queen Elizabeth I produced gift books for New Year, composed of her own translations of *Prayers or Meditations* (published in 1545) by Katherine Parr (1512–1548) into Latin, French and Italian.

the path of the flames to prevent the fire from spreading. The poem carries on with the metaphorical description, presenting Aeolus, Jupiter and Mulciber (Vulcan) as responsible for igniting the fire further, while Mulciber even has words put into his mouth as he addresses the goddess Thetis, representing the Thames (31–44). The destructive impact is visualized by a simile (45–50) and by the presentation of London as a human being (51–2).

With a new start the poem goes on to suggest that the pope in Rome, Alexander VII (1655–1667), was unhappy with the heresy in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom and sent followers of Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), who was born in the Basque Country and founded the Society of Jesus, to destroy the city of London (53–71). They enlist Vulcan, who, in the guise of the ‘Gaul’ (78), throws the first torches;²⁰ then they spread the fire everywhere (72–82).²¹ The devastation in the city is described (83–94), with inventive Latin paraphrases of English street and place names; the situation is illustrated by the simile of a ship (95–104). This leads up climactically to a vivid sketch of the destruction of buildings and life across the city and the inability of the poet to voice his sadness adequately (105–18). At this stage, shortly before the turning point of the narrative, the author expresses the total ruin of the population with words inspired by *tantum nomen* (111), though with the appropriate caution: he (112–13) alludes to the words by which, according to the report of Vergil’s Aeneas, Panthus describes the devastation of Troy by fire after the Greeks had entered the city by means of the Wooden Horse.²²

A poetic sketch of three sunrises indicates that the fire lasted for three days without abating, followed by an indication of areas destroyed or almost affected (119–38). That the fire did not demolish also the well-protected Tower, the seat of *Mars Britannicus*, is explained by ‘God’ (137), who must be the Christian god, eventually having pity and providing help: it is reported (with the cautious introduction *fama est*) that there had been an initiative of some Christians, who had been banished from the city and, despite their miserable state caused by their banishment from London, had turned to God with emphatic prayers: they appealed to him to pardon the sinners, arguing that it was enough for the Ignatian

20 This is presumably an allusion to the alleged arsonist, the French watchmaker Robert Hubert, who (falsely) confessed that he started the Fire and was then executed.

21 The example of a *vetusta urbs* destroyed by fire and the wish that God should exercise his old anger (73–6) could be an allusion to the punishment and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

22 Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 2.324–7: *venit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus / Dardaniae. fuimus Troes, fuit Ilium et ingens / gloria Teucrorum; ferus omnia Iuppiter Argos / transtulit; incensa Danai dominantur in urbe.*

fathers to have destroyed a single ‘city’ (139–60).²³ It is added that the entire population, under the clergy’s leadership, flocked to the churches to pray for a halt to the flames (161–4).

According to the poem, God listens to the prayers and returns confidence to the king and the people. Since it is not specified which prayers God reacts to, but only the activities of the Nonconformists have been described in detail and as effective, the poem’s addressee, belonging to the expelled Nonconformists, can read this explanation of the change in God’s attitude as a confirmation of this Christian doctrine. The piece goes on to relate that the king (Charles II, who, in contrast to Parliament, was still tolerant towards other Christian denominations) takes action and gives instructions to contain the fire by destroying houses through blowing them up with nitrate powder and drenching everything in water. So, finally, the fire abates on the fourth day, after having consumed all the houses it had previously affected (165–94). The poem concludes on the happy note that God has snatched ‘us’ from the flames and will bring back happy times, being milder to a reborn city (195–7).

Thus the poetic narrative combines a rather precise description of the spread of the fire and the measures to fight it with an analysis of the responsibility for the fire and for the salvation. The description of responsibility is rather complex: the Pope is described as having wanted and ordered the fire and therefore having sent the Jesuits to Britain; the alleged French arsonist, who pleaded guilty and was executed, is obliquely presented as an instrument of the divine intervention; those who have ejected the Nonconformist Christians also share responsibility. For, although the author mentions the prayers of the entire population, salvation is essentially obtained through the intervention of those Nonconformists, which God listens to and acts upon (139–64). On a human level rescue is provided by the king (168–87), through destruction leading to salvation, since the Mayor had been useless (23–6). Parliament, as having passed the Acts on religious conformity, is not mentioned.

The emphasis in this poem on the connection between the Fire and the religious troubles is supported by the way in which it is laid out: it is surrounded by a number of notes in the margin, linked to the respective places in the text by signs or numbers starting afresh on each page.²⁴ These notes mainly provide the standard English names for streets, buildings and areas in London described in

²³ This is a reference to the areas of London known as the City of London and the City of Westminster.

²⁴ The notes are reproduced in the margin of the Latin text in the appendix and have been incorporated in square brackets into the attached English translation.

Latin paraphrases in the poem. Only a single note (at 140) is in Latin (n. 6 on the page) and marked as a note by an initial 'N.'; this note spells out what the poem implies or presupposes: that 'Roman' priests were responsible for expelling the Nonconformists. It is uncertain whether the notes (also found attached to the poem about the Netherlands) go back to the author or whether all or some of them may have been added by the printer. Perhaps the Latin note was provided by the author and marked as a note in the manuscript, whereas the sequential numbering and the clarification of factual items in English could have been provided by the printer.

With its strong focus on religious conflicts as the reason for the incident, this poem recalls the situation of the Gunpowder Plot, when a group of Catholics planned to blow up the Houses of Parliament on 5 November 1605.²⁵ This context is reflected in poems on the Gunpowder Plot: for instance, the poetic description of the incident by John Milton (1608–1674), allegedly composed when he was seventeen years old, *In Quintum Novembris*, indicates at the end that God saved the Britons from the attacks of the 'Papists'.²⁶ Other poems on the Fire of London mention the helpful intervention of the king and the fact that blowing up houses in its way eventually contained the Fire,²⁷ but they do not create such an explicit link to the religious situation.

Peter Causton's poem ends in gratitude to God and hope for better times in a re-born city (195–7). When it is said that God saved 'us', the reference is unclear since the group of Christians the author seems to sympathize with had been ejected from the city before the Fire, but he may be thinking of the impact for the country, any measures of retaliation or a hope of reconciliation.

This New Year's poem thus turns out to be a rather specific interpretation of the events; it both displays personal features and demonstrates a prototypical reaction to the catastrophe. The piece is a mixture of an attempt at poetry with a

25 For the link between the two events in the popular imagination, see Porter 1996, 171: 'Indeed, regardless of the findings of the enquiries into the causes of the Great Fire, that disaster quickly took its place with the Marian persecutions and the Gunpowder Plot as palpable evidence of a real and dangerous Catholic threat'.

26 John Milton, *In Quintum Novembris* 201–3 (God speaking to Fama): *Fama, siles? An te latet impia Papistarum / Coniurata cohors in meque meosque Britannos, / Et nova sceptigero caedes meditata Iacobo.*; 220–2 (about God): *Attamen interea populi miserescit ab alto / Aethereus pater, et crudelibus obstitit ausis / Papicolum, capti poenas raptantur ad acres.* – A Latin text and an English translation of the poem are available e.g. at: <http://philological.bham.ac.uk/milton/> (D.F. Sutton 1999 / 2013).

27 See e.g. John Dryden, *Annus mirabilis* (see n. 11 above); Simon Ford, *The Conflagration of London Poetically Delineated* (see n. 12 above).

historical description and a strong political and religious statement. Any human tragedies caused by the Fire are not of interest; technical details of the spread of the Fire and its containment take centre stage. A major factor therein is the blame for the incident, recalling what happened after the fire of Rome under the emperor Nero (Tac. *Ann.* 15.44.2–3): the text presents the Fire of London as a threat to life and property, engineered by religious opponents, and reassures the audience that God’s understanding and intervention eventually saved the inhabitants. The fact that a particular group of people is blamed as being responsible for the Fire is the reason for the cautious remarks in the dedication; by the time the poem was published, this view had been accepted officially, as the author notes.²⁸ The version in the poem, however, is unique in the way in which it combines the different alleged reasons and motivations: according to this account the Fire was caused and then not halted because of measures taken by the Pope and the Jesuits as instigators as well as the inactivity of the Mayor in fighting the Fire. By contrast, the Fire was extinguished because of prayers of the expelled Christians and the intervention of the king, who was still religiously tolerant at the time. The respective proportions and the relations between these aspects are not made absolutely clear; overall the impression emerges that God listens to the badly treated expelled Christians.

This Nonconformist element may explain the poem’s publication date and its allegedly delayed publication: while blaming the ‘Papists’ for the Fire became a widespread attitude, the view that they might pit different groups of Christians against each other and that the Nonconformists were instrumental in initiating the containment of the Fire is more idiosyncratic. It may have been easier to voice such a reading after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and particularly after the Toleration Act of May 1689, which gave some freedom to Nonconformists: the volume’s *Imprimatur* is dated to 17 September 1689.

28 Thomas Vincent (1634–1678), a Nonconformist minister, for instance, explicitly attributed the Plague and the Fire of London to the Clarendon Code (see n. 17 above): *God’s Terrible Voice in the City. Wherein you have I. The sound of the Voice, in the History of the Two late Dreadful Judgments of Plague and Fire in London. II. The Interpretation of the Voice in a Discovery of the Cause and Design of these Judgments. The Fifth Edition, corrected.* By T. Vincent, sometime Minister of Maudlins, Milk-street, London. Printed for George Calvert 1667 (available on Google Books), pp. 25–6: ‘1. *Concerning the judgments themselves.* Here I might speak of the judgment executed, August 24, 1662, when so many ministers were put out of their places; and the judgments executed, March 24, 1665, when so many ministers were banished five miles from corporations; the former by way of introduction to the plague which some time after did spread in the land, but chiefly raged in the city; the latter by way of introduction to the fire, which quickly after did burn down London the greatest corporation in England’.

Thus this poem stands out by its combination of aspects and the pronounced Nonconformist perspective. That a London merchant presents such an analysis in a Latin poem is indicative of the intellectual culture in London at the time. Equally, the piece is a hitherto hardly recognized document for the political and religious situation in seventeenth-century Britain.²⁹

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²⁹ I am grateful to Luke Houghton and Victoria Moul for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

Appendix: Latin text and English translation

LONDINI Conflagratio

CARMEN

Strenæ loco Miffum

ad R. V.

Calendis *Januarii*, Anni 1666/7.

- LÆta dies rediit qua fol *feliciter* orbe
 Annuus emenfo, nova reddere fecula mundo
 Gefit, & elapfum reparare benignior annum;
 Hac me Mufa die rerum profcribere curas
 5 Cogitq; & ftudiis jubet infervire folutum:
 Hac te *Ralphe* die mea parvula carmina juffi
 Ire falutatam, veniamq; precarier aufis
 Si fortè offendant animo divina parantem.
Londini Conflagratio
 10 *Bataviæ* quondam terræq; & gentis honores
 Exili plectro lufi, at nunc triftia fata
 Lugeo, deletamq; infeftis ignibus urbem
 Quà Tamefis præceps fertur, vaftâq; feroces
 Pontis mole dolet fubter juga cogier undas,
 15 Ædefq; impofitas fuper ipfum fluminis alveum
 Verticibus (vifu mirabile) vincere nubes.
 Dic mihi Mufa quibus ducibus, quibus artibus altæ
 Creverunt flammæ, quis ferrea pectore corda
 Condens, fatales accenferit, auxerit ignes.
- 20 Viculus eft vulgo farti * cognomine notus,
 Hïc primùm fua tela jacit Vulcanus, & unis
 Ædibus infenfum fimulat, facilèq; repelli
 Poffe videbatur, fi primum cura furorem
 Provida tentaffet compefcere. More vetufto
 25 Conful prætoresq; adfunt, fed fata refiftunt,
 Iratq; Dii; fertur nocturnus lacchus
 Illorum obcæcaffè animos, prudensq; *Minerva*
 Deferuiffe urbem, tum cum lex dura miniftros
 Chrifti omnes, facris qui permifcere negârunt
 30 Ambiguos ritus, juffit fecedere, vota,
 Tot juftùmq; preces ne numina fumma piarent;
 Æolus inflârat ventos, & Juppiter æftu
 Infolito miferam flammis devoverat urbem:
 Sola Thetis, fummâ, triftis confederat arce,
 35 Lignea * quæ mediis exfructa in fluctibus undas
 Surfum ferre folet, rapidèq; referre deorfum
 In medios urbis vicos; hanc Mulciber irâ

**Pudding-lane.*

* *The Waterwork
 by the Bridge.*

Percitus ut vidit, tu vana refiftere noftris
 Fatorumq; audes conatibus? inquit; at hinc te
 40 Quin celeri rapias pede, nam mihi præda futura eft
 Arx tua, vix tremulam fe condidit arce relictâ
 Undis, quum flammis glomerantibus undiq; preffa
 Machina terribili fonitu ruit; inde citato
 Ignea vis curfu, nullo remorante, vagatur
 45 Intrepidè, facilèq; folo quæq; obvia fternit.
 Sic ubi montanis, campefter, fluctibus, auctus
 Intumuit torrens, & fuetas aggere rupto
 Tranfiliit ripas, vagus arripit obvia faxa,
 Præcipitefq; trahit truncos, & gurgite lato
 50 Sternit humi quercus, hominumq; boumq; labores,
 Feftinatq; ipfas evertere funditus urbes:
 Sic, fic flamma furit, rapidèq; per intima fertur
 Vifcera Londini, crudelifq; obruit ædes.
 Ille hominumq; Deiq; hoftis, cervice revinctus
 55 Sacrilegâ, triplici diademate, templaq; Chrifti
 Sancta tenens, fallax fimulator, & arte paternâ
 Infulans animis, feptem qui collibus URBIS
 Aftutè dominatur, & arbiter orbis haberi
 Gefcit, Chriftiadas fupplantans cæde doloq;,
 60 Fertur felectos miffiffe per *Anglica* regna
 Ignatios Patres, *Sanctum* qui nomen Iëfu
 Arripuere fibi, cædifq; doliq; miniftros,
 Sic fatus. Chari, nonne *Anglica* regna videtis
 Hæreticis famofa novis? qui dogmata *Petri*
 65 Divina irrident, nobis vobifq; ruinam
 Æternam meditantur, & altis mænibus Urbis
Londini innixi jactant *Babilona* ruendum?
 Si vos relligio movet, aut Ecclefia mater
 Sacra *Petri* fedes, propriæ fi cura falutis,
 70 Aut fi nofter honos, properantem avertite cladem,
 Et quâ nos terrent, iftos delete ruinâ,
 Ite, agite, infeftam fubvertite funditus urbem.
 Accingunt operi celeres, & trans mare currunt,
 Audierant, olim, *Vulcano* ardente, vetuftam
 75 Interiiffe urbem; juvat ire, ac in fua vota
 Attraxiffe Deum, precibufq; & ponderis auro
 Ingentis, veteres ut rurfum exerceat iras;
 Jurant fe focios; victus Deus annuit aufis.
 Ergo ubi Vulcanus, diri fub imagine *Galli*,
 80 Sulphureis primas telis invaferat ædes,
 Loyolitarum circumvolat improba turba,
 Ceu præceps actus violento turbine ventus,
 Hac atq; hac flammam facibus flagrantibus augens.
 Jamq; igni crefcente, vorat flamma horrida montem

- 85 Sacratum *Cereri* 1, vicos queis Gratia * nomen
Lombarda 2 & Bombarda 3 dedit, Venerifq; 4 diei
Et Ligni 5, & Patris 6 notos cognomine noftri,
Quofq; ingens olim *Tamefifq;* 7 & *Fleta* 8 *vetufta*
Infigniverunt, fora Portæ dicta 9 recentis,
90 Vicum 10 quem vili pretio merx vendita clarum
Reddidit, innumerofq; alios; tua templa *Joannes*,
Nec tu *Laurenti*, nec *Paule*, vel alma *Diana*,
Nec *Michael*, nec tu veneranda Deipara Virgo
Eripere huic monfiro poteras; non marmore ftructæ
95 Turres, faxifragæ valuère refiftere flammæ;
Sed veluti magnâ in navi, cum fæva coorta eft
Tempeftas, raucio funis ftridore rudenfq;
Frangitur, atq; illac nutans atque hac malè firmus
Jamjam merfuram minitatur rumpere puppim
100 Malus, follicitus crebrâ ferit ipfe bipenni
Nauclerus truncum, cadit alto vulnere victus,
Et tumido longè dat noxia corpora Ponto;
Sic cum flamma vorax, trabibufq; & poſte perufio,
Fundamenta cavat, labat alto pondere turris,
105 Horrendùmq; fremens dat membra cadentia terræ.
Quis ftrages miferas, noctefq; diefq; nefandos;
Quifnam templa Deûm, quis tecta flagrantia latè
Explicit! horribilemq; fugam juvenumq;, virumq;,
Infantumq; metus, & fœmineos ululatus!
110 Non, mihi fi ex oculis manaverit uber aquarum
Rivus, fat deflere queam tam nobilis Urbis
Excidium, tanto fi nomine dicere fas eft:
Londinum fuimus, fuimufq; antiqua *Britannûm*
Gloria, nunc cineres triftes, urbibq; cadaver:
115 Hic tecta, hic turres, hic templa jacentia fædè
Cernitis, heu, paffim, femuftaq; membra virorum:
Triftis ubiq; pavor, triftiffima mortis ubiq;
Horrendæ facies, quatit ardua fydera clamor,
Singultus, gemitufq;, & mixtus murmure planctus.
120 Ter fol luciferum gelidis caput extulit undis,
Lucentemq; comam velatus nube rubenti
Permixti flammis fumi, lugubria lugens
Fata, exſpiranti dat lumina triftior urbi;
Qualia cum Phæbea foror terram inter & inter
125 Fratrem fe mediam convolvens fydera textit.
Necdum flamma iras ponit, non unius urbis
Exuviis avido fatiato gutture, at inftat
Abforbere alias, aliafq;, & jam imminet atrox
Urbi quam decorant antiqua Monaſtica 1 fana
130 Obverfa occiduo foli; jam tecta minatur
Plurima quæ a reliquâ *Tamefis* 2 diviferat urbe
- 1 *Cornhil*. * *Grace-church street*. 2 *Lombard-str*. 3 *Cannon-street*. 4 *Friday-street*.
5 *Wood-street*. 6 *Paternoster Row*. 7 *Thame-street*. 8 *Fleet-street*.
9 *Newgate-Market*.
10 *Cheapside*.
The ſeveral churches dedicated to the ſaid Saints.
- 1 *Westminster*.
2 *Southwark*.

- Auftrali subjecta auræ; nunc quæ vaga circùm
 Mænia 3 fe attollunt; nunc quæ tu nauta per alti
 Fluminis extenfas ripas utrimq; 4 frequentas;
 135 Nunc quæ castra 5 tenet *Mars* ipse *Britannicus*, ingens
 Quamvis tutetur flumen, vallum, invia fossa;
 Et miseranda forent victricis victima flammæ,
 Ni Deus auxilium tuleratq;, animosq;³⁰ labantes
 Numine præfenti tandem firmaverat æquus.
 140 Fama est, Christiadam haud paucos, quos æmula turba
 Pontificum 6, fictâ sub imagine religionis,
 Fecerat exilio damnarier, ullius Urbis
 Mænibus haud recipi dignos, neq; municipali
 Jure frui, clamans; hunc tandem Numinis alti
 145 Innocuum spretumq; gregem, cum nulla salutis
 Spes erat humanâ dextrâ, penetralibus imis
 Semotum, facie macilentum, & corpore fractum
 Carceribus, plagisq;, & vestes pulvere trifti
 Asperfum, genibus curvatum altaria circùm
 150 Sacra Dei, obnixè his votis precibusq; tremendi
 Iram contendisse Dei fedare furentem.
 O Pater omnipotens irate, itidemq; benigne,
 Qui peccata odisti, at peccatoribus usq;
 Ignoscis, si corde humili, si pectore fracto
 155 Ad te converfi scelerata piacula lugent;
 Tu quondam Ifacidum gentem, licet usque rebellem,
 Non tamen implacidus voluisti perdere, ne se
 Effreni efferrent hostes, Nomenq; Jehovæ
 Ludibrio foret; alme Deus miserere tuorum;
 160 Nonne fat Ignatiis concessum est patribus unam
 Interiisse urbem? fiste, o fiste optime flammæ.
 Quinetiam Populi cuncta ætas, sexus, & ordo
 Templâ petunt mæsti, Cleroq; auctore, vicissim
 Vota Deo, ritè, perculso e pectore fundunt,
 165 Graffantem ut placeat tandem compefcere flammam.
 Annuit Omnipotens votis, animosq; labantes
 Inftaurat populi, procerumq; & sceptrâ gerentis,
 Monstravitq; viam quæ tuta repelleret ignem.
 Ergo, favente Deo, magnâ comitante catervâ
 170 Nobilium, plebisq;, & fratre & milite multo,
 Sceptriger intrepidus circumvolat, undiq; flammæ
 Obvius, & sacro volvens sub pectore vulnus
 Illatum regnoq;, fibiq;, & corde volutans
 Fatalem exstinxiffe ignem, dat iussa fecutis.

3 *The houses and
 suburbs about the
 Walls.*
 4 *Wapping,
 Rotherhithe and
 other places on both
 sides along the River.*
 5 *The Tower.*

6 *N. Romanorum,
 quibus clam incitantibus
 hæc lex lata fuit, ut
 reformati sese invicem
 lacerañtes paratior illis
 præda forent.*

30 Apparently a printing error.

- 175 Fefitinate viri, atq; opponite pectora flammæ,
 Ipfe favens aderit Deus, hæc hæc fternite tecta,
 Ipfe viam oftendam, vos fidi attendite dictis.
 Non vacat harpagone, ut quondam, non fune tenaci
 Detraxiffe trabes lentas, heu, flamma volucris
- 180 Improvifò aderit, lacerataq; tectaprehendens
 Contiguas ædes rapiet, fed flamma repelli
 Per flammam debet, fic regna furentis avernï
 In fe verfa cadent, concuffaq; flamma recedet.
 Pulveris, haud mora fit, nitrati vafcula centum
- 185 Vos totidem tectis fupponite, tædaq; lucens
 Accendat, dicto citius tollentur in altum,
 Et fublata dabunt recidentia corpora terræ;
 Undiq; proftratis immittite flumen aquarum.
 Nec mora, feftinant alacres, & iuffa faceffunt:
- 190 Utq; urbs, hoftili cum cingitur undiq; vallo,
 Deficiente cibo, perit intima vifcera rodens;
 Sic, cum proftratis domibus circumdatur atrox
 Flamma, ut ad intactas nequeat perrumpere, tandem
 (Ut quartò rediens fol fratrata apfexerat urbem)
- 195 Deficit, abforptis quas ante invaferat ædes.
 Nos Deus eripuit flammis ferroq; facratos,
 Et jam fole novo felicia tempora reddet,
 Inq; renaturam fervabit mitior urbem.

The burning of London

Poem

Sent in place of a New Year's gift

To R. V.

On the Calends of January, of the year 1666/7.

The bright day has returned on which the sun, having happily completed a yearly cycle, desires to bring back new centuries to the world and to restore the year gone by, being more kindly. On that day the Muse forced me to boycott my concerns for business [5] and ordered me to devote myself to studying, free from cares. On that day, Ralph, I ordered my little poem to go and greet you and to beg for pardon for this daring undertaking if, by any chance, it should offend you as you prepare divine matters in your mind.

The burning of London

In the past I have playfully written poetry about the beauties of the Batavian land and people [10] with a slender plectrum, but now I mourn the sad fate and the city destroyed by inimical fires, where the Thames quickly flows past and grieves that its wild waves are forced beneath the yoke by the vast mass of the bridge and the buildings placed above the very bed of the river [15] defeat the clouds by their rooftops (wonderful to see). Tell me, Muse, by what leaders, by what devices did the high flames grow, who, hiding an iron heart in his breast, kindled and enlarged the fatal fire.

There is a neighbourhood, commonly known by the name of pudding [n. *: Pudding-lane]. [20] Here Vulcan first throws his missiles and pretends to be hostile to only a single house and seemed to be possible to be thrust back easily, if at the beginning attention marked by forethought had managed to hold in the fury. According to traditional custom a consul and praetors are present, but the fates [25] and the enraged gods resist; nocturnal Iacchus is said to have clouded their minds and wise Minerva to have left the city, at that time when a harsh law ordered all ministers of Christ who had refused to mix up doubtful rituals with sacred practices to withdraw, so that vows [30] and prayers of so many of the just might not propitiate the highest divinities. Aeolus had blown up the winds, and Jupiter had doomed the poor city to the flames amid unaccustomed heat. Thetis alone, in sadness, had sat herself down atop the wooden citadel [n. *: The Water-work by the Bridge], which, erected in the middle of the floods, was accustomed to let the waves [35] run upwards and bring them quickly downwards again in the middle of the boroughs of the city. As soon as Mulciber, moved by anger, saw her, he said: 'Do you, in vain, dare to resist the attempts of ourselves and the fates? But why are you not moving yourself away with swift foot, for your citadel is my future booty.' [40] Having left the citadel she, trembling, hardly covered herself beneath the waves when, pressed by the accumulating flames on all sides, the structure falls down with a terrible noise; then the force of the fire spreads in a hurried course with nothing stopping it, intrepidly and easily, and it crushes to the ground whatever is in its way. [45] Thus [it is], where a brook in the plain, enlarged by mountain floods, has swollen and gone over its usual banks with the dam broken, moving around, catches rocks in its way, carries with it tree trunks fallen headlong and, in its broad whirlpool, brings down to the ground oak trees and rushes to erase the labours of men and cattle [50] and even cities entirely. Thus, thus, the flame rages and is rapidly borne through the innermost parts of London and cruelly destroys houses.

That enemy of men and God, girded at the sacrilegious neck with a three-tiered tiara, holding the sacred temples of Christ, [55] a deceitful pretender and trampling upon the minds with papal art, who cleverly reigns over the seven hills of the City [i.e. Rome] and aims to be regarded as the ruler of the world, causing Christendom to stumble with murder and ruse, is said to have sent selected [60] Ignatian Fathers through the English kingdom, who have usurped the sacred name of Jesus for themselves, the servants of murder and cunning. Thus he spoke: 'My dear friends, don't you see that the English kingdom is notorious for new heretics, who ridicule the

divine doctrines of Peter and [65] think of eternal ruin for us as well as for you and, leaning on the high walls of the City of London, brag that Babylon must fall? If religion moves you or the mother Ecclesia, the sacred seat of Peter, if concern for your own well-being or if our honour [moves you], ward off the destruction fast approaching. [70] And destroy those with the ruin by which they terrify us. Go, come on, overthrow the hostile city completely.'

They quickly get ready for the task and rush over the sea. They had heard that once an old city perished when Vulcan was burning; it is pleasing to go and [75] to have turned God to their vows by prayers and gold of immense weight, so that he once again may exercise the old anger; they swear that they will be companions; persuaded, God approves the daring plans.

Thus where Vulcan, in the guise of the dreadful Gaul, had invaded the first houses with missiles of sulphur, [80] the impious crowd of the Loyolites flies around, like an impetuous wind driven by a violent whirlwind, here and there increasing the flame with burning torches.

And already, with the fire increasing, the horrible flame devours the mountain sacred to Ceres [n. 1: Cornhil], the neighbourhoods to whom Gratia [n. *: Grace-church street], [85] Lombarda [n. 3: Lombard-str.] and Bombarda [n. 4: Cannon-street] have given their names, and those known by the name of the day of Venus [n. 5: Friday-street] and of Wood [n. 6: Wood-street] and of our Father [n. 7: Pater-noster Row] and those that once the huge Thames [n. 8: Thame-street] and the old Fleta [n. 9: Fleet-street] made famous, markets named for a recent gate [n. 9: New-gate-Market], a neighbourhood that merchandise sold for a cheap price [90] has made known [n. 10: Cheapside] and innumerable others; neither you, John, nor you, Lawrence, nor you, Paul or nourishing Diana, nor you, Michael, nor you, God-bearing Virgin to be honoured [n.: The Several Churches dedicated to the said Saints], could snatch your temples away from this monster: not the towers erected from marble were able to resist the rock-breaking flame. [95] But just as in a large ship, when a wild tempest has arisen, the cable and the rope are broken with a harsh sound, and the mast, not sufficiently strong, nodding here and there, threatens to break the ship already about to be submerged, anxious, the ship's captain himself strikes the wooden mast with frequent strokes of an axe, [100] it falls, overcome by a deep wound, and spreads harmful pieces over the sea swollen far and wide. Thus, when the greedy flame, after beams and the doorpost have been burned down, hollows out the foundations, the tower falls with its high weight and, horribly roaring, puts its falling limbs on the ground.

[105] Who could describe the miserable devastation, the abominable nights and days, who the temples of the Gods, who the houses burning far and wide! The horrible flight of young people and men, the fears of small children and the wailing of women! Not, even if a river full of water flowed from my eyes, [110] could I sufficiently cry over the downfall of such a noble City, if it is allowed to say with such a great name: We were London, and we were the ancient glory of the Britons, now we are sad ashes and the corpse of a city. Here you see houses, here towers, here temples lying hideously, [115] woe!, everywhere, and half-burned limbs of men: everywhere sad fear, everywhere the most sad appearances of horrible death, crying strikes the high stars, sobbing and groaning and lamenting mixed with muttering.

Three times has the sun raised its light-bringing head from the cold waves [120] and, having veiled its bright hair in a red cloud of smoke mixed with flames, mourning the sad fates, gives light rather sadly to the dying city, just as when Phoebus' sister, circuiting in the middle between the earth and her brother, covers the heavenly body [of the sun]. [125] The flame does not yet lay its anger to rest, the greedy mouth not satisfied with the spoils of a single city, but it is eager to swallow up others and more, and already the frightful flame looms over the city that ancient monastic sacred buildings adorn, facing the setting sun [n. 1: Westminster]; already it threatens [130] very many houses that the Thames had separated from the rest of the city, exposed to southern winds [n. 2: Southwark]; now those that rise scattered around the walls [n. 3: The houses and suburbs about the Walls], now those that you, seaman, often visit along the extensive banks of the deep river on both sides [n. 4: Wapping, Rotherhithe and other places on both sides along the River], now the camps that the British Mars himself holds [n. 5: The Tower], [135] even though a huge river, a palisade and an impassable trench protect them; they too would have been pitiable victims of a victorious flame if God had not brought help and, being kind, strengthened the weak minds eventually with his divine presence.

There is a rumour that not a few of the Christians, whom the rival crowd [140] of priests [n. 6: Note: Of Roman <priests>, on whose secret instigation this law was proposed that the 'reformed Christians', lacerating each other, would be readier prey for them.], under the made-up appearance of religion, had caused to be punished by exile, proclaiming them not worthy to be received within the walls of any City nor to enjoy citizen rights, [the rumour is] that this innocent and spurned flock of high Divinity eventually, when there was no hope of salvation [145] from a human hand, withdrawn in the innermost sanctuary, emaciated in their faces and broken in their bodies from the prison and strokes, sprinkled with sad dust on their clothes, bowed on their knees around the sacred altars of God, with these vows and prayers, strenuously [150] made an effort to settle the raging anger of the awe-inspiring God: 'O almighty Father, angry and likewise benign, you who hate sins, but continuously pardon sinners if, with a humble heart and broken breast, they have turned to you and mourn their criminal sins: [155] once you did not wish to be implacable and destroy the Jewish people, though continuously rebellious, so that they would not raise themselves as headstrong enemies and the name of Jehovah would become an object of ridicule. Nurturing God, have pity on your people. Is it not sufficient that it has been granted to the Ignatian fathers [160] that a single city has perished? Stop, o, stop – most excellent one – the flames.'

Furthermore, all ages, sexes and classes of the populace approach the temples in sadness, and with the clergy as leader, in alternation duly pour forth vows to God, from their beaten breast, that it may please him finally to contain the roaming flame.

[165] The Almighty accepts the vows and restores the tottering spirits of the people, the leaders and the sceptre-bearer [i.e. the king]; he has shown a way that safely wards off the fire.

Thus, with God's support, with a large group of noblemen and of the people accompanying, and his brother [i.e. brother of the king, later King James II and VII] and many soldiers, [170] the

sceptre-bearer rushes around without fear, everywhere against the flame and turning over in his mind beneath the sacred breast the wound brought to the kingdom and himself and pondering in his heart how to extinguish the fatal fire, he gives orders to those who have followed him.

‘Hurry up, men, and set your bodies against the flames. [175] God himself will be there in support, tear down these, these houses, I myself will show the way, you listen loyally to my words. There is no time, as before, to tear down the tough beams with a hooked pole or a clinging rope, alas, the winged flame will be there unexpectedly, and gripping the damaged buildings [180] will snatch the adjoining houses, but the flame must be pushed back with a flame, thus the kingdom of the furious underworld will fall, turned against itself, and, weakened, the flame will recede. Without delay, put a hundred containers of nitrate powder under as many houses, and let a glowing torch [185] set them alight, and they will go up into the air faster than can be said, and, raised up, they will lay their body mass on the ground as it sinks. From everywhere send a river of water into those fallen down.’

And there was no delay, they hurry eagerly and carry out the orders. And as a city, when it is surrounded on all sides by an enemy palisade, [190] with food lacking, perishes, gnawing its innermost innards, thus, when the wild flame is surrounded by torn-down houses, so that it cannot reach the unharmed ones, eventually (when the sun, returning for a fourth time, had seen the levelled city) it dies, after having devoured the houses that it had previously entered into.

[195] God has saved us, doomed to destruction by flames and the sword, and now, with a new sun, he will bring back happy times and will watch over her, milder towards the city to be reborn.