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R E M A R K S

ON THE

R E S O L U T I O N S

PASSED AT A MEETING OF THE

NOBLEMEN, GENTLEMEN, AND CLERGY, OF THE
COUNTY OF WARWICK,

Held on Feb. 2, 1790.

IN

THREE LETTERS,

TO THE

Right Hon. the Earl of Aylesford,

CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING.

WITH SOME

OCCASIONAL REMARKS

ON THE

RESOLUTIONS AT BARTLET'S BUILDINGS.

BY WILLIAM PARRY.

THE SECOND EDITION,

WITH

A N A P P E N D I X.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

TO afford the reader a connected and impartial view, of the Resolutions examined in the following pages, they are here inserted from the advertisement, which appeared in the public papers, and was signed "AYLESFORD, CHAIRMAN."

At a most numerous and respectable meeting of the principal Noblemen, Gentlemen and Clergy (members of the established Church) in the County of Warwick, held this second day of February, 1790, at the County Hall, in Warwick, pursuant to public advertisement, for the purpose of taking into consideration proper measures for the defence of the Constitution, against the present attempts of the Dissenters to obtain a repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, the following Resolutions were unanimously made: The Right Hon. the Earl of Aylesford in the Chair.

I. THAT the Church of England, as by law established, is an essential part of the British Constitution.

II. THAT the right to share, the public employments and emoluments of a state is, like all other rights in a state of society subject to the control of a supreme power, that is the legislature.

III. THAT the offices and employments from which the Dissenters are excluded, by the Corporation and Test Acts, are not rights indiscriminately open to the claim of every citizen, but trusts to be conferred at the discretion of the crown for the service of the state, or bodies corporate for the management of their particular concerns.

IV. THAT the legislature have a right to confine public employments, to persons professing the established religion of the country, if it shall appear expedient for the public good.

V. THAT the provisions which the wisdom of the legislature has thought fit to make, by the Corporation and Test Acts, for the security of the church and state, have

have been found sufficient to answer that purpose, and that it is highly expedient to continue them in force.

VI. THAT the Protestant Dissenters, during the mild and auspicious reign of his present majesty, have been completely exempted from every restraint upon religious liberty.

To the above were added, several resolutions of thanks, to particular Noblemen, or Gentlemen, &c. on which it would have been indelicate to remark, and which therefore it is unnecessary to quote.

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R E M A R K S, &c.

LETTER I.

MY LORD,

PHILOSOPHY teaches us, that the want of a more enlarged intercourse amongst mankind, is a principal cause of national prejudices; and, that in proportion as men become acquainted with one another, by the aid of commerce or the light of literature, those prejudices usually subside. This remark is applicable not only to men of different nations, but to the inhabitants of the same kingdom, as they may be separated from each other by different tenets of religion, or different rites and forms of worship. For want of a better acquaintance with the learning, piety, and amiable qualities of many in the established church, the Dissenters* in England, may perhaps entertain some degree of unjust prejudice against them. And to the want of a more just and intimate acquaintance with the principles, views, and dispositions of Dissenters, that bad opinion which is entertained of them, by many members of the establishment, probably ought to be imputed.

* By "Dissenters," in these Letters is always meant Protestant Dissenters, unless distinctly mentioned otherwise.

On this ground, candour will account for that general alarm, which the Clergy, and others in the church, have taken at the application for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts; and which has given rise to the meeting where your Lordship presided, and to many others of a similar nature. To suppose, without the most positive evidence, that the alarm is not real, would impeach the integrity of a numerous and respectable body, and discover such illiberality as must disgrace an intelligent mind. Those, therefore, who are convinced that it is *groundless* and *unjust*, will attribute it to some of those causes, by which even the wisest, and most improved of mankind, are liable sometimes to be misled.

It is not, my Lord, the design of this address to offend your Lordship, or any of the Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Clergy who met at Warwick, on the second of February, by any rude or unbecoming language or uncandid reflections. It is only intended, with due deference to the rank and learning of that assembly, to bring to the test of reason and fair investigation, the resolutions which they passed, and the political principles contained in them. May it not then be presumed, that this attempt will give no just cause of disgust to any, seeing men of learning, candour, and philosophic improvement in every station of life, are willing to have their sentiments examined, and disposed to relinquish them if they are found to be utterly indefensible.

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The resolutions of the meeting at which your Lordship filled the chair, are fixed upon as the subject of investigation; because, as they avoid any *direct* and *violent* reflections on Dissenters, so they are framed with greater ability and caution than those passed at some other meetings of the Clergy. — The preamble to the resolutions states, that the meeting at Warwick was called, “For the purpose of taking into consideration proper measures, for the *defence* of the constitution, against the present attempts of the *Dissenters* to obtain a repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.” Does not this language imply that the attempts of Dissenters to obtain that repeal, are attempts to *destroy* or *subvert* the constitution? And was it not exceedingly uncandid, my Lord, in that “Numerous and respectable meeting,” when giving an account of their design, to publish such an insinuation? Is it probable that Dissenters are attempting to subvert the present constitution of their country: the *only* constitution that ever granted them liberty and protection? Surely there ought to be some very *solid* reasons to support it, before a charge so improbable in itself, and of such magnitude and importance, should be brought, even by implication, against any body of men. As to the *principle* assumed in this clause of the preamble, that the Test and Corporation Acts are the barrier of the constitution, its refutation is easy, but shall be deferred to the examination of the fifth resolution, with which it coincides. The farther consideration of it in this place, would be the more improper,

as there is no public evidence by whom the preamble was composed.

The first resolution however which the meeting passed is thus expressed: "That the church of England as by law established, is an *essential* part of the British constitution." It is natural to ask here, my Lord, what the meeting intended by the words, "British constitution?" Did they mean the *civil* constitution, or *ecclesiastical* establishment of this country, or both? They could not mean the *civil* constitution, for the church is no part of the civil polity, however closely connected with it. Neither could they mean the constitution in church and state; for then the resolution would only affirm, that the church is a part of the constitution in *church* and *state*; which is the same as affirming, that the church established by law, is the church established by law. As neither of these senses can be admitted, it remains to be enquired, what idea the resolution was intended to convey, by asserting the church to be an *essential* part of the constitution? Probably it was this, that the civil constitution of this country is so closely connected with the ecclesiastical establishment, that they must *stand* or *fall together*: or that the excellent constitution of the state, can subsist no longer, than while the *present* constitution of the church is maintained. It is the more likely that this was the idea intended, though not fully expressed, by the resolution at Warwick, because it has been avowed by other meetings of the Clergy.

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The Gentlemen assembled at Bartlet's Buildings, asserted, that "The interests of the civil and ecclesiastical constitution in this realm, are *inseparably* connected." Admitting that there exists a *real* and useful connection between them in England; yet, my Lord, what *necessary essential*, or *inseparable* connection can there be, between *any kind* of civil government, and a religious establishment in *any form*? How can the British constitution in particular, depend on the form and preservation of the episcopal church? Might not the religious establishment of this country continue as it is, though the balance of the civil constitution were destroyed, and our present *mild* and *equitable* government should degenerate into an absolute monarchy? And is it not a *possible* case, that our civil constitution might be preserved, though the wishes of some *wise* and *great* men in the church, for an alteration of some of its forms, were granted?

Our civil constitution, my Lord, is a firm and beautiful fabric. Was it erected and finished by the members of the present establishment? Had it no existence before the Reformation, or the act of uniformity? When it was completed at the Revolution, were they the most zealous in the hierarchy who assisted in the work? Did those who brought to pass that great event, act as members of the establishment, or as men, and as Britons? Had the Dissenters, now represented as enemies to the constitution, no concern in the transaction; or could it
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have been accomplished without their generous concurrence ?

But granting that we are wholly indebted for our excellent civil constitution, to the wisdom, liberality, and patriotism of the prelates of former times, is it *impossible* that the advantages of the British constitution should be continued, unless the religious establishment remains unaltered? Is it impossible that we should have a King, Lords, and Commons, unless we have Archbishops, Bishops, and inferior Clergy? Has the crown no *other*, nor *better* support than the *mitre*? Could there be no seat in the upper house for the Earl of Aylesford, and other Peers of the realm, unless there were also a bench for the Right Reverend Lords? Could not the Commons of England be assembled in parliament, unless the Dean and Chapter of collegiate churches held their meetings? Could not the statute law maintain its authority, unless the canons of the church remained in force? And would it be altogether impracticable for the courts at Westminster to administer justice, unless the ecclesiastical courts exercised their spiritual dominion?—The religious establishment of Scotland is *presbyterian*, yet the inhabitants of that part of the island are British subjects, and enjoy the benefits of the British constitution. Has it different properties as it extends north or south of the Tweed? Is it *essentially* connected with *presbyterianism* in Scotland, and with *episcopacy* in England? The affirmative or negative of this question *equally* destroys the principle
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of the resolution, and proves, that our civil constitution has no *essential* or *inseparable* connection with either the one, or the other form of church government; and that men may enjoy the benefits of peace, liberty, and a free constitution, such as the British, whatever form of religion happens to be approved by the majority, and is established by law.

Neither your Lordship, nor any members of the establishment, need be alarmed at these enquiries. They are not introduced because Dissenters have the *least design* to attempt obtaining an alteration of the religious establishment; but to shew, that the principle adopted by the meeting at Warwick, and the "Society for promoting Christian knowledge," is a *mistaken one*, and *indefensible*.

The second resolution signed by your Lordship, as chairman, runs thus: "That the right to share the public employments and emoluments of a state, is, like all other rights in a state of society, subject to the control of a supreme power, that is, the legislature." In this resolution, expressed in an abstract form, there is, my Lord, a most essential mis-statement of the subject. It is founded on a supposition, that amongst the subjects of a state, there exists *somewhere* a right to share in its public employments and emoluments, and asserts this right with all others to be under the control of the legislature. The question whether any subjects of a state have a *right to share* in its trusts and emoluments, may be left, until the third resolution

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is considered, under which its discussion must necessarily be introduced. It is more material here to examine the *general principle* affirmed in the second, which is plainly this, "That *all rights* in a state of society are subject to the control of the supreme or legislative power." And is this a principle on which legislators ought to act, or which subjects are bound to acknowledge? What! my Lord, are *all* the rights of men in a state of society subject to the control of the legislature? By living in civil society, do they surrender up all their rights without *exception*, to the control of the supreme power? If so, a state of society must be worse than the most savage state of nature. The proper, and only rational end of civil government is the *public good*; and for this end it ought to be firmly, and liberally supported. By entering into society, men part with *some* of their rights, or intrust the exercise of them to the legislature, in order to have the enjoyment of others which are more valuable or necessary to the comfort of life, secured by the authority of law, and defended by the arm of power. But if *all* their rights in a social state were subject to control, might be *granted*, or *wilkbeld*, as the supreme power of a state happened to be disposed, THE VERY END OF THE INSTITUTION OF GOVERNMENT WOULD BE DEFEATED. If all rights were given up to the legislature, and might be controlled by it, then it would be impossible for a bad legislature to do wrong, or in any case to go beyond its limits. For, supposing that it controlled all the rights of men in the *most arbitrary* manner, it would only control what had
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been surrendered to its disposal, and then legislation, instead of a *blessing*, would become a *curse* to mankind.

Some of the consequences of this doctrine, my Lord, that all rights are under the control of the legislature, might be *humorous* in idea, but would be *dreadful* in fact. Men have a right to eat when they are hungry, drink when they are thirsty, and sleep when they are weary; and it is humbly to be hoped, that these rights will never be subjected to the *control* of the legislature. For it would be hard indeed, if an honest labourer might not take a night's rest, a lady sip her tea, or a citizen eat his breakfast, but according to act of parliament! Left, however, this should be thought too ludicrous, let the principle be more *seriously* considered with regard to other instances.

Every man has a right to *life*, to the free use of his *limbs*, and to *liberty*, while he does not injure his fellow creatures. Are these rights, in a state of society, subject to the sovereign control of the supreme power? Has any legislature upon earth a right to make laws, to take away the lives or the liberty of peaceable and unoffending subjects? If it assumed such a power, would it not exceed its due bounds, would it not forfeit its own right to *legislate*, and would not all authority then revert to its origin, the people?

The right of *property* commences in a state of society, and one important end of civil government
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is to secure to men the enjoyment of *that* right. But what will it avail, that persons are secured from the depredations of individuals, if they may be deprived of all they possess by the legislature? Would any of the noble Peers of England, admit that the legislature might divest them of their princely estates, while they have not offended against the crown? It is true, that in society, the property of subjects is liable to taxation for the public service, and the legislature being the *representatives* of the *people*, may control a *part*, in order to give them the more *certain* and *advantageous* enjoyment of the remainder. But surely, the *whole* property of useful and unoffending subjects is not liable to the legislative control, and may not be *alienated* by it. If this were the case, there could be no such thing as *private property*, which English law is so solicitous to guard. Men in society would not then be the possessors of their own fortunes, but mere collectors for an exchequer, and slaves to a board of control for the *home* department.

Every man has a right, my Lord, to judge for himself in matters of religion; to form and enjoy, without interruption, his own religious opinions, while he does not injure the peace of society. Is not this a right *unalienable* in its own nature? Is it by the social compact surrendered to the legislature? Can any government have authority to make laws, that all men shall think alike in religion? Or if it has the authority to *enact*, has it the power to *execute* such laws? Can the *edicts* of the state *enlighten* the conscience, or the *power* of the sword *convince* men
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of the truth of abstract propositions? If the principle of the resolution be admitted, the foundations both of *civil* and *religious* liberty would be destroyed, and the *right of property* taken away. That, "ALL rights in a state of society are subject to the control of the legislature," is a principle that would justify the most absolute *civil despotism*, and the most horrible degree of *religious intolerance*. It is more calculated for the meridian of Rome, than for Great Britain; and more suited to a state of abject slavery, than the liberty of a free country. If the supreme power may *control* and *govern*, *abridge* or *withhold all the rights* of men, it is of little consequence whether that unbounded authority centers in one person, or in a thousand: a foundation is equally laid for *despotic* rule, and in that case it might be more eligible to have one tyrant than many.

But there are rights, my Lord, which never can be surrendered to the legislature, and which even the supreme power of a state can have no *just authority* to control. On this principle our ancestors acted at the Revolution, and on no other can it be justified. If James II. had received the authority of a venal and obsequious parliament, for his invasions of the rights of the church, and the liberties of the subject, the injuries would not have been less real, nor less contrary to natural *equity* and *justice* than they were: nor would it have been either less necessary, or less justifiable in the nation, to have brought to pass that revolution which took place. All rights therefore, in a state of society, are so far

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from being subject to legislative control, that there are certain rights which if the supreme power invades, it breaks that original compact with the people by which it exists, and virtually forfeits its own authority. To deny this, would be to deny the principle on which the revolution was founded, to which the church of England owes her security, the kingdom its liberties, and our present gracious Sovereign his title to the crown.

From the above considerations it appears, that the general principle asserted in the second resolution is *false* and *dangerous* in itself, repugnant to the *spirit* and *freedom* of the British constitution, and most *extensively injurious* in its consequences. May it not be concluded, that it was not sufficiently examined when the resolution passed, and that the principle only gained admittance amidst the hurry of a public meeting? The noble Peers who gave their sanction to it at Warwick, would no doubt disavow the principle in the house of Lords, and in their legislative capacity, would not think themselves authorized to control the lives, liberties, or consciences of any of his Majesty's peaceable and good subjects.

With this conjecture, which cannot be pronounced uncandid,

I am, My Lord,

Your Lordship's

Most obedient Servant, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

MY LORD,

MISAPPREHENSION, to which all men are liable, frequently leads them not only to form a wrong judgment of facts or opinions, but to adopt measures without just occasion. To this cause it must be owing that the meeting at Warwick passed their third resolution, which, if they had been properly acquainted with the principles and views of Dissenters, they must have seen to be unnecessary. It is published in these words “ That the offices and
 “ employments from which the Dissenters are ex-
 “ cluded by the Corporation and Test Acts, are not
 “ *rights* indiscriminately open to the claim of every
 “ citizen, but *trusts*, to be conferred at the discretion
 “ of the crown for the service of the state, or bodies
 “ corporate, for the management of their particular
 “ concerns.” From the language of this resolution, as well as the second, it seems to have been the sense of the meeting, That although public offices and employments, are not “ *Rights* open to the claim of every citizen,” yet there are *some* citizens who have a “ *Right* to share” them. If this be a principle held by any in the established church, your Lordship may be assured it is utterly disavowed by Dissenters; and those only who hold the principle are concerned to defend it. As to the other part of the resolution, that public offices are “ *Trusts* to be
 “ conferred at the *discretion* of the crown for the
 “ service

“ service of the state, or bodies corporate for the
 “ management of their particular concerns ;” Dissenters have the happiness to coincide in opinion with the respectable meeting at Warwick. It expresses the very sentiment which they hold on the subject. But your Lordship will pardon me for saying, that in framing and passing this resolution in opposition to the application for the repeal, the meeting appears to have misconceived, in some degree, of the subject itself, and to have mistaken totally the views of Dissenters. Let me crave your indulgence for a short discussion of both.

As to offices of trust and emolument in the state, no citizen, my Lord, as such, has a right to possess them. They are not *rights* open to the “ claim” of *any citizen whatever*, but are, as the meeting properly observed, *trusts* to be conferred at the *discretion* of the crown. No subject considered merely *as such*, hath a right to bear office in the state, or enjoy its emoluments ; but every man, not a criminal, has a right to be *eligible* to office. A right to *office*, can only be derived from the appointment of the executive power, but to be *eligible* to office, to be in a capacity of receiving such an appointment, if the executive power should think him fit for the public service, is the right of every obedient and faithful subject. To the want of attending to this *obvious* and *important* distinction, candour will ascribe the present outcry against the claims of the Dissenters, for it must be attributed to this, or some *less honourable* cause.

Dissenters,

Dissenters, my Lord, do not *claim* offices of trust, power, or emolument. They do not consider them as *rights*; the idea would be absurd. But they claim exemption from *reproach*, from unjust *disqualifications*, from opprobrious *stigmas*. They claim this, as the civil right of every *peaceable* and *orderly* citizen in the state; of every loyal subject of the British crown. It is their opinion that no man ought to be subject to any civil incapacities, inconvenience or suffering, *merely* on account of religion, while he conducts himself as a good subject, and useful member of the community. Yet because they do not conform to the establishment, they are by the Corporation and Test Acts subjected to great civil incapacities. A brand of infamy is undeservedly fixed upon them, and, as if they were without distinction *treacherous* and *disloyal*, they are disqualified for the meanest office in a borough, or the lowest trust under the crown. In such circumstances, they consider themselves as deprived, *on account of their religion only*, of those civil rights which equally belong to all orderly and faithful subjects in the state. They request the repeal therefore of the Test laws, as *unjust* and *oppressive*. They claim as a civil right the removal of their disqualification, and that they may stand on the same ground of *eligibility* to office as their fellow subjects; and farther than this, their claim of *right*, as to the Corporation and Test Acts, does *not* extend. If they were repealed, the actual appointment to offices in the state, would still remain at the option of the crown; and in

corporate towns, at the election of their fellow-citizens; and it is the wish of Dissenters, to leave the *right of appointing* to office, and its *entire* exercise, where the British constitution has with great wisdom placed it. Yet in saying this, it is not pretended, that they have no desire to share in civil offices which are honourable or advantageous. But surely, Englishmen can never justly represent it, as an instance of *criminal*, or *base* ambition, that any amongst them should have a wish to serve their country, or partake in the usual and just emoluments connected with such services! The charge of *selfish* ambition, if brought against Dissenters, might with more justice be retorted upon such as wish to confine, within the pale of the church, those offices of the state, which ought, at the appointment of the crown, to be *accessible* to faithful subjects of every description.

These are the ideas of Dissenters respecting public offices and the repeal of the Test laws; and who, my Lord, by fair and open argument can prove their ideas to be *improper*, or their claims *unjust*? Ought men who are guilty of *no crime*, to be subject to *any punishment*? As a body, Dissenters are guilty of *no crime*. They are *obedient* to the laws of the state. They *contribute cheerfully* to its support. They bear their part in all public burdens, in common with their fellow subjects, and have they not then an *equal* right with them to be *eligible* to offices? Have they not an *equal* right to complete civil liberty? They are a numerous and useful body of subjects.

subjects. Their conduct, ever since the state granted them protection, has proved them to be peaceable and loyal, in an eminent and exemplary degree. There are not, within the limits of the empire, any subjects more attached to the civil constitution, or more firm friends to the present government, than the Dissenters are. Their property, political consequence, manufactures, commerce, and literary improvement, are far from being contemptible. But notwithstanding their *respectable* character, and *peaceable* deportment, they are by the Test laws proscribed, and held up to universal odium, as delinquents unworthy the public confidence. And is *this* the treatment, my Lord, which an useful class of citizens, *ought* to receive, from the *justice* and the *gratitude* of their country? Shall men who have added to its strength by their commerce, to its philosophical knowledge by their discoveries, and to its moral improvement by their writings and example, be deprived, on account of *their religion*, of any of the usual rights and civil privileges of *British* subjects? If it be admitted, that *peaceable* and *orderly* citizens, may be subjected to incapacities and disqualifications, *merely* because their faith does not come up to the public standard, or their worship answer the established forms, is it not admitted, that men may be made to suffer for their religion *only*? Would not this also, be admitting a principle which would justify the most *severe persecution*? It is in vain to plead, "They are deprived of their *eligibility*, to prevent their becoming *dangerous*." If the reason were *true*, it would not *vindicate* the principle. All

the persecuting laws that were ever in force, were enacted to guard against some future evil, *real* or *imaginary*. If therefore, you subject men to *present* suffering, on account of what they might do *in future*, you admit a principle, which, if followed to its full extent, would as much justify all the horrid persecutions of the Romish Church, as the lowest degree of civil proscription. But the assumption is *false*; and under the subsequent resolution it shall be proved, that the continuance of the Test Laws is as *impolitic*, as their principle is *unjust*. As Dissenters plead therefore, for the removal of an *unjust* restraint, and, that public “ trusts may be at the *discretion* of “ the crown for the service of the state,” and of “ bodies corporate for the management of their “ particular concerns,” may they not hope, for the generous support of the meeting at Warwick, which has avowed the *same* principle? May they not hope that assembly will join its efforts with them, to remove that restraint which now lies on the *discretionary* power of the crown, as well as on the *liberties* of Dissenters?

But although the meeting acknowledges the prerogative in the third resolution, it pleads for the *abridgment* of it in the fourth. It is published under your Lordship's signature, thus: “ That the legislature have a right to confine public employ-
“ ments, to persons professing the established reli-
“ gion of the country, if it shall appear *expedient* for
“ the public good.” The legislature of every country, my Lord, has an undoubted right to adopt
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for the public welfare, every measure that is *wise* and *just*. But can any legislature ever have a right to violate the obligations of natural *justice*, or to inflict *punishment* where there is *no crime*? If it be inconsistent with impartial justice, to fix a mark of *disgrace* upon a large and *useful* part of the community, and to take away civil rights from subjects who are guilty of no offence, would any legislature be justifiable in doing it, although the measure should promote the public good.

But, admitting that the legislature of a state, is possessed of more than *omnipotence*, and has a *right* to do *wrong* for the public welfare; it is denied with respect to this country, "That confining public employments to persons of the established religion, is *expedient* for the public good." If this point can be clearly proved, the *policy* and *wisdom* of the measure, even on the principle of your *resolution*, will fall to the ground. May it not be hoped, my Lord, none will contend that the *public* good, is the good of the church of England *merely*, or that the whole Scottish nation, with all the Dissenters in England, are *no part* of the community, or of the *public*, whose good ought to be promoted? The *public* good is the good of the *whole* kingdom, of all his Majesty's British subjects, however distinguished by their religious sentiments. And how can the good of the *whole* be promoted by confining all public employments to a *part*, though it be in the southern division of the island, the far greater part of the community? Can it ever be
expedient

expedient for the *general good*, that none should fill offices of trust, or even be *eligible* to them, but members of the establishment, unless it can be proved, that *talents* and *abilities*, *honesty* and *fidelity*, are confined to them? The impartial will think, that the *public* good would be most effectually promoted, by employing in the service of the state, men of the most distinguished talents, undaunted courage, and unshaken probity, whatever their religious creed might be. Has not the community a claim to the services of its most *able* and *faithful* members, wherever they may be found? What *solid* reasons can be given, why a kingdom should be deprived of the abilities and services of any class of subjects, who are true to their allegiance? May not the courage of a soldier, the wisdom and sagacity of a statesman, the uprightness of a magistrate, or the honesty of an exciseman, be of equal importance and utility to his country, whether he goes on a Lord's-day to a church or a meeting-house, bows to the east, or worships with his face towards any point of the compass? Would it not be wise and politic, therefore, to employ in the public service, any *faithful* and *loyal* subjects, that have abilities for its different departments, however various their religious tenets? Do not other nations act upon this principle, and find the public good promoted by it? Would not the adoption of such a measure in England, conciliate the esteem and affection of subjects of every description, teach them to forget religious animosities, in the more generous affection of love to their country, and give the kingdom a
greater

greater degree of harmony and firmness in all its exertions against foreign enemies? Would it not, therefore, by producing such an *union*, most effectually subserve the *public* good? But, confining *eligibility* to office to the members of the establishment, prevents this union, with all the national benefits which would result from it. The Test, without producing one public advantage, maintains an *invidious* distinction among his Majesty's Protestant subjects; takes away, from a part of them, some of the motives of attachment, which should be *equally* granted to all, and deprives the community of the abilities and services of a large and respectable part of its own members. Instead of leading Englishmen to bury the animosities of former times, in mutual liberality, harmony, and confidence; the continuance of the Test laws is only calculated to perpetuate amongst them *ancient prejudices*, and to foster in their breasts all the *rancour* of religious hate.

Supposing however, my Lord, for the sake of argument, that the public good were the good of the established church *only*; it is neither *necessary* nor *expedient* for the promotion of that good, that all public employments should be confined to its members; and if it were so, the Test laws are an *insufficient* provision for that end. On both accounts therefore, their continuance appears to be *impolitic*. What danger could possibly occur to the establishment, if those laws were repealed? It would then be at the will of the executive power, whether to appoint one Dissenter to office, or not. Is the present
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sent government so little attached to the church, that there would be *any* danger of its making an *indiscreet* use of its discretionary power? Need the church *fear* to trust her interests in the hands of the crown? If Dissenters were appointed to civil offices in common with their fellow subjects, how could the security of the church be in the least shaken thereby? Would not the act of uniformity, the rich and ample revenues of the church, and the connection between its interest, and that of all the great families in the kingdom, still secure its prosperity, and the number of its adherents? Is it impossible that it should stand, but upon the *ruins* of *justice*, and the *subversion* of the *civil rights* of Dissenters? Would not the church enjoy her ritual, and all her emoluments, untouched by any but her own members, although a Dissenter might have a post in the army, or a commission in the excise? It is difficult to conceive, how a Presbyterian, sitting in the long room at the custom-house, could push a Prebendary out of his stall; how the foundations of the church could be undermined, by a Dissenter examining a wine vault; or how the steeple should totter before the guaging rod of an exciseman! But this subject must be *resumed* under the next resolution.

Admitting therefore, for the present, that the exclusion of Dissenters from office, is *expedient* for the good of the church, it will be sufficient to shew here, that the Test laws are no *adequate* provision for that end. There is no act now in force, my Lord, against *occasional* conformity. Such Dissenters, therefore,

fore, as are men of no principle, however dangerous they may be, cannot possibly be kept out of office at present, by the operation of *those laws*. If they have interest to procure an appointment, and a conscience which can comply with the Test, they may gain admittance into places of trust and power. If danger could arise from any among them, it must be from such characters. Men of integrity and principle could never be so dangerous, as those who can adopt any measures for their own interest. If it be necessary therefore, for the welfare of the establishment, that all public offices should be filled by its *faithful* members, it should exert its influence to procure some more decisive, and unequivocal Test of conformity than the present: for as the laws now stand, *unprincipled* men of all *parties* may creep into power.

If a Test were at all needful, an additional reason why the Clergy at least, should wish for some other than the present, may be drawn from the ordinance of religion which is now appropriated to that end. It cannot be denied, that the test laws, if they do not *appoint*, very frequently *occasion*, a most shameful prostitution of a sacred institution, to purposes *merely* secular. Men take the Lord's supper not for their moral or religious improvement, but to enjoy a place in the admiralty, or handle gold at the pay-office. From *bowing* at the levee of the minister, they *rush* to the altar, and from the altar *run* to the E O table, or some other scene of dissipation. Thus an institution designed to commemorate the death of
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the great Author of Christianity, for the *pious* instruction of his followers, is turned into an engine of *civil* policy, and made subservient to the *worldly* interests of men.—Ye holy Ministers of religion, and Prelates of apostolic purity and zeal, can ye behold without trembling, this horrid prostitution of your Saviour's death; and the temple of God, over which ye were appointed to watch, polluted by the unrighteous worshippers of Mammon? —If ye do, may the angel of mercy blot out your indifference in the dreadful records of guilt!— But should the prophanation still be made, infidels will continue to treat Christianity with contempt, and laugh at religion as the creature of the state; while sober Christians, of *every* communion, will weep in secret over that prostitution of sacred things to which they do not contribute; and will *tremble* for the *reckoning* which those, who from their office, were *obliged*, and from their influence were *able* to prevent it, will be called to, before the Judge of quick and dead.

Such, at least, is the opinion of

Your Lordship's

Humble Servant, &c.

LETTER III.

MY LORD,

BY the Corporation and Test Acts, men are deprived of the usual rights of citizens, *solely* on account of their religion. That such a restraint upon the liberty of the subject, is neither necessary nor politic for the general good, has been suggested. Its insufficiency for the good of the church, has also been hinted, and comes here to be farther discussed. But if it could not be proved, if the acts in question were as *ample* and *effectual* a provision for the safety of the church as is pretended, this would not justify the continuance of them, unless upon the popish maxim, that all things are lawful for the good of the church. No motives of *utility*, or *expedience*, can in any case vindicate a measure founded upon *injustice*. Nevertheless, the fifth resolution passed at Warwick, while it carefully avoids asserting the *justice* of the Test, maintains its *expedience*. This is its language: "That the provisions which the wisdom of the legislature has thought fit to make, by the Corporation and Test Acts, for the security of church and state, have been found *sufficient* to answer that purpose, and that it is highly *expedient* to continue them in force." One consideration alone, my Lord, might shew the *insufficiency* of this provision against Dissenters, if any danger had been apprehended from that quarter; which is, that the lawfulness of *occasional conformity* was very commonly allowed among
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the Dissenters of the last age. By this practice, they actually possessed offices, notwithstanding this provision ; and that at a time when, from the persecutions they had suffered, their minds might be irritated, and more disposed, if ever they had been inclinable, to injure the church. But, let the subject of this resolution be more *minutely* examined, and it will be found, that what is asserted by it, is not only without a *just* foundation, but injurious to the *honour* and *credit* of the established church.

The Corporation Act, passed in the year 1661, was the first penal statute enacted in the intolerant reign of Charles II. It was plainly a measure of revenge, levelled against the Nonconformists, in violation of the royal faith *pledged* by the declaration at Breda. Upon the authority of Mr. Locke and Bishop Burnet, it is said, that many groundless rumours of plots and intended insurrections were spread through the kingdom, to prepare the way for it. But if the measure had been justifiable and expedient then, on the ground of policy, is it *equitable* or *generous* to continue such a restraint upon civil liberty, and perpetuate a penal law, when the reason on which it was founded, has long ceased, if ever it had a real existence ?

Let the motives which introduced the Corporation Act, however, have been what they might, it appears to have been neither a wise nor *sufficient* provision for the security of the church and state. If its wisdom and efficacy had been ever apparent,
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it must have been from the time it was passed, until the *Test Act* was made. But what security did it afford the church during this period of twelve years, that Dissenters were *excluded* from offices in corporate towns, while they were *eligible* to offices in the state? Where was the wisdom of excluding a Dissenter from the office of mayor or bailiff in an obscure corporation, if it were *possible* for him at the same time to be a secretary of state, or have the command of a regiment? If he could be formidable and dangerous to church or state in any situation, he would be much more so at the head of a troop, or in the chambers of Whitehall, than in a Cornish borough. But the fact was, though the Corporation Act was ineffectual; offices of state, were then in the gift of the crown, and the church was safe, while the court was attached to it. The case would be still the same, if both that and the Test were repealed.

It cannot be objected here, "The insufficiency of the Corporation Act to guard the church and the state against the Dissenters was felt, and therefore the Test Act was adopted as a farther security to both, against *their* designs." The truth is, my Lord, that the Test Act was not *originally intended* against Protestant Dissenters. The title of the act assures us, it is an "Act to prevent dangers which happen from Popish Recufants." It was a measure of expediency, which the Parliament adopted in 1673, when the heir to the crown was an avowed Papist, and most of the ministry of the same persuasion. Its object was to turn the Catholics out

of power, and defend not only the church of England, but the Protestant interest in general, against *their* designs. When the bill was agitated, the court endeavoured to gain the interest of the Dissenters to oppose it, which might have prevented its passing. But, as it was understood on all sides of the house, the bill was not intended to operate against them, they generously gave up their own interest for a time, and joined the church in supporting the measure as a common defence against popery; not doubting, but that the justice and humanity of the house, would relieve them, at a more convenient period*. These facts are too notorious to be denied. It is, therefore, by a very uncommon fatality, that a law intended against the Papists *only*, is made to operate against one of the parties which assisted in framing it, and that the church has pointed on the Dissenters the very battery which they assisted it to raise against the common enemy of both: so the Catholics of that day were esteemed. The resolution under consideration, however, affirms the Test laws to be a wise provision, which *has secured* the church and state. The necessity, *if real*, of such a provision, arose neither from the principles nor designs of the Dissenters; but, as now stated, from the inclination of the reigning family to *popery*. While that family sat on the throne, and the necessity continued, the provision *was not* “found *sufficient* to “answer that purpose;” for Papists got into power,

* The above is intended as a narrative of *facts*, not as a vindication of either the Dissenters or the Churchmen of those times.

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and the church was *really* in danger. When the government was changed, the necessity of the measure ceased, whose inutility had been before experienced. From the Revolution the purpose would have been answered, and church and state been equally secure, if the Test had been repealed. Since James II. there has been no prince on the throne, so little inclined to the church, that it was necessary to lay such a restraint upon him. As the Test laws are not *now* necessary, and while necessary were found *insufficient* where is the expediency of continuing them? Nevertheless, it is affirmed, that they are “*A provision* which the wisdom of the legislature has made for the *security* of the church and state. This principle itself, therefore must be farther examined.

The Gentlemen at Bartlet’s Buildings have expressed it stronger, by saying the Test is “*A wise* and *necessary* provision for the common security of the civil and ecclesiastical constitution.” With violence of language they farther declare, that by the repeal, the “*Influence of Dissenters in the* concerns both of church and state would be increased to a degree inconsistent with the *safety* of either.” Pardon, my Lord, a short digression to notice this illiberal language, which, if compared with that of the meeting honoured with your presence, forms a contrast much to the credit of the *latter*. The poignant shafts of satire, might be discharged against that *bigotted* spirit, which would represent many thousands of peaceable christians,

who fear God and *honour the king* according to the gospel, as dangerous enemies to the government. Reason might argue, that the cause of intolerance, in which such *rash* and *unsupported* assertions are used, must be *weak*, and would admit of no better means of defence. Charity might wish that, the annals of the christian world may not furnish such another instance of an *unchristian* spirit for five centuries to come. Infidelity too, might here pertly furn a contemptuous sneer at the *narrow* spirit of christianity, when a "Society for *promoting Christian Knowledge*" would suggest all men to be rebels who do not believe in the book of common prayer, as well as in the bible. But leaving the logician to pursue his reasonings, the christian to exercise his virtues, the satirist to return his shafts quietly into his quiver, and the infidel to make the wonderful discovery, that the illiberality of Christians is not chargeable on Christianity, let me attend only to the principle common to both the resolutions. It is, that the Test laws are a provision for the security of church and state against the Dissenters.

As to the *church*, my Lord, experience and facts prove, that such laws are no necessary provision for its security. In Scotland there is no Test, yet the religious establishment of that country is not in danger by the want of it. Is *presbyterianism* a better cause than *episcopacy*; or does the *kirk* stand on firmer ground than the *cathedral*?—In Ireland the Test has been for several years repealed, yet there the proportion of Dissenters to Churchmen
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is much *greater* than in England. Can the Irish church be safe amidst a large body of Dissenters, perhaps nearly equal to itself in number, and is the church of England in danger from Dissenters here, who are not half so numerous as its own members? Or shall the English clergy be less liberal and less tolerant than their brethren of the Irish establishment?—In foreign kingdoms, Dissenters are employed in the army, the finances, and other departments of the state, without the established religions of those nations running any risk, or suffering any evil by such arrangements. Papists employ Protestants in their service, and Protestants Papists. Can popery and protestantism indifferently be safe in other countries, while those of opposite sentiments to the respective establishments, are in *possession* of public offices; and will the reformed establishment of this country be in danger, by such Protestants as differ from it being only *eligible* to office? Is the church of Rome more able to defend herself than the church of England? Or does the Protestant Establishment of this country stand upon a weaker foundation, than Protestant churches abroad?

In the heathen empire, Christians were employed in the service of the state, without any danger to the ritual of Numa. Paganism did not fall by the official influence of the followers of the Cross, but by the irresistible light and evidences of Christianity. Is it possible that an establishment of the *reformed religion* should be less secure, if Dissenters from it

were in the army or the police, than the religion of the *beaten* was under similar circumstances? Or shall it be said, that the worshippers of idols manifested more of the spirit of liberality and toleration, than the members of a Christian church?

The *consequences* of calling the Test a *wise* and *necessary* provision for the security of the church, also refutes the position. Surely, my Lord, the Clergy of the establishment have not fully considered *them*, or they would not have raised the cry, "The church is in danger." The Gentlemen at Bartlet's have founded it loud and far, and it may be inferred from other resolutions of the Clergy. But does this doctrine, of the Test being the *great* barrier of the church, or provision for her safety, pay a proper compliment to the *constitution* of the church of England? If the "most distant prospect of the Test being repealed," would be a cause for the greatest apprehension "and alarm to all the true friends of the established church," what must her constitution be, that she should be in any danger from such a cause? The church of Jesus Christ, my Lord, is founded upon a rock, and "The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Its form and constitution *need not* the aid of penal statutes for their preservation, but are secured by the wisdom, power, and providence, of its Almighty Head. Does the church of England stand on a different foundation? Does it need the assistance of penal statutes for its defence against the force of reason and arguments, the only weapons by which it can be
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in any danger of being attacked? Does it stand, not on the ground of Scripture evidence and truth, but on the laws of the state? Does it owe its security, not to its conformity with the word of God, but to the power and authority of a human government? Is the "Divine right of episcopacy" then, given up by the members of the establishment; and is it *acknowledged* at last, that its form and constitution are not to be found in the holy scriptures, but in acts of parliament? Do Gentlemen in the church really own, that it must fall, if the support of *penal* and *persecuting* statutes are withdrawn from it? Your Lordship will observe, the affirmative of these questions *is not* here asserted, but it is maintained, that the affirmative *must* be granted, if the *continuance* of the Test be necessary for the *support* of the church, or if she would be in *danger* by the repeal of *penal* laws. But the truth is, my Lord, that the church does not owe her security to the Test and Corporation Acts, nor would be in the least danger by their abolition. Her form and constitution, her liturgy and worship, her patronage and revenues, would remain just the same as they are now. The repeal would not alter the terms of conformity in the least degree, nor open the door for the admission of *one* Dissenter to share *her* emoluments, if he desired them. The pretence that it would, is too futile to merit a reply.

With respect to the state, my Lord, the Test laws can be no provision for its security against Protestant Dissenters, but upon supposition that their

political principles are hostile to the civil constitution of their country. It cannot be consistently urged by any members of the establishment, that the principles of the Revolution are not the principles of the English constitution. At that memorable æra, it was defined, limited, and settled; and it is a fact of the most public notoriety, that there are no subjects, more firmly attached to the principles of the Revolution, than the Dissenters are. Their political principles are those which rescued the *church* from the danger of popery, liberated the *kingdom* from the oppressive grasp of arbitrary power, and seated the *illustrious* house of Hanover on the English throne. Since the Revolution, no body of subjects have shewn more *unshaken* loyalty to the government, nor *consistent* regard for the constitution, than they have done. There have been repeated attempts in the present century, to dethrone the rightful sovereign, and introduce a popish pretender. Many *disaffected* subjects of the established church, as well as Catholics, joined in each of the attempts, but *not one* of the English Dissenters. They lent all their aid to support the throne when its foundations were shaken, and were ready to part with their fortunes and their lives in its defence. How then can it be maintained, that any provision is requisite to secure the state against their attempts? or how can they be represented, with any shadow of *truth* and *justice*, as enemies to the constitution? An appeal to their conduct, is a sufficient refutation of such groundless calumnies.

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If the church and the state, my Lord, be considered as *connected* together, the consequences of calling the Test laws "A wise provision" for their *joint* security, will shew the assertion to be equally ill-founded. If it be a provision for the safety of the civil constitution and the ecclesiastical establishment, it is *weak* and *insufficient*. It provides against a Dissenter's occupying a trifling out-post, but betrays the citadel at once into the hands of the dangerous foe. It locks him out of the custom-house, but admits him to take a seat in St. Stephen's chapel. If Dissenters were inclined to injure either church or state, where could they do it so effectually as in parliament? There, if in any situation, they would be dangerous. But the experience of more than a century, has proved that they may be admitted into parliament, and act as legislators, without the smallest danger to the church or the state. If this fact be connected with the doctrine of the Resolution, the most absurd conclusions would follow, such as these: Dissenters may sit in the British senate without any risk to the public, but should they have a place in the council of a corporation, the constitution would be at stake. They may have a vote in making laws for the government of the *whole* kingdom, and no bad effects follow; but should they have a voice in making a bye-law for a *petty Borough*, the kingdom would be in danger. They may have seats in parliament, and be joined in the legislation of their country, without their influence being the occasion of any alarm; but, should they occupy a post under government in the most
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distant plantations, “ Their influence in the concerns “ both of church and state, would be increased to a “ degree inconsistent with the *safety* of either.” They may with the other representatives of the people hold the strings of the public purse, and the property of the kingdom remain safe; but should any part of the revenue be intrusted to their hands, the nation would be on the eve of bankruptcy. They may assist in enacting laws by which the civil or ecclesiastical constitution might be altered, improved, injured, or changed, and both church and state remain in *perfect security*; but should they as officers of his Majesty’s customs, surprize and overpower a party of smugglers, not *they*, but the *constitution* would be overturned, the mitre would fall to the ground, and the crown itself be in danger!! To state such absurd reasoning, is to refute the principle which *necessarily* leads to it. If Dissenters without injury to the church or state may sustain that public character, which is of the last importance to the *security* of both, they might doubtless fill much inferior offices without *danger* to either. This being the case, the cry of danger to the church from the repeal of the Test, although they may be sincere who raise it, can be nothing but a *groundless* alarm, calculated to mislead the public, and awaken their apprehensions against the claims of justice, equity, and sound policy.

The only Resolution, my Lord, which now remains to be considered, as having a relation to the subject, is the sixth, conveyed to the public in
these

these words: "That Protestant Dissenters, during
 " the mild and auspicious reign of his present Ma-
 " jesty, have been completely exempted from every
 " restraint upon religious liberty." Probably this
 Resolution refers to the alteration made in the terms
 of toleration by an act made in the nineteenth year
 of his present majesty. In this view, its meaning is
 much the same as that passed at Bartlet's Buildings,
 in which it is asserted, that " The Protestant Dis-
 " senters in England, do *actually* enjoy the blessings
 " of a *full* toleration."

Toleration, my Lord, is a subject that will ever
 be dear to every friend of human-kind; and it is a
 pleasure to behold advocates for it amongst the
 most zealous adherents to the established church.
 But though it may be a *general* it is a *mistaken* opi-
 nion, that the Protestant Dissenters have a *complete*
 and *legal* toleration in England. That ornament
 of the episcopal church, Archdeacon Paley, asserts,
 that while Dissenters are disqualified from office,
 toleration is only *partial*, and contends for the
 repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, as ne-
 cessary to a *complete* toleration*. The whole pas-
 sage does great honour to the strength of his under-
 standing, and the benevolence of his heart. But,
 my Lord, if the Test laws were repealed, tole-
 ration would not be complete. Under the present
 mild and auspicious government, Dissenters, indeed,
 have enjoyed their religious liberty, through the *non-*

* See Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy, p. 578, &c.
 second edition.

execution of the laws in force against them, and a few among them have legal toleration, by qualifying according to the statute of the nineteenth of the present reign. Those who do not, or *cannot* qualify, however, are liable to the penalties of the old persecuting statutes; and though it may be matter of surprize to your Lordship, there are *many* Protestant dissenting ministers, who cannot conscientiously comply with the present terms of toleration. This is the case of *many* among the orthodox, as well as among those called Unitarians or Socinians.* The ground of their scruples does not lie against the oaths of allegiance, or the declaration of faith in the scriptures. *The act of qualifying*, they consider as taking out a licence to preach, from the civil magistrate. Such an action, in their view, is in-

* The terms Orthodox, Socinians, &c. are here used only by way of *distinction*. The number however, of those Dissenters who are commonly called Orthodox, is by *far* the largest. They hold the *doctrines* in general contained in the articles of the Church of England, not because they are the articles of *that* Church, or expressed in *human creeds*, but because they believe them to be contained in the Scriptures. And, in number, throughout England and Wales, the Orthodox Dissenters are probably as two, if not as three to one, to the Socinians and Arians *inclusive*.—This is a fact worth stating, because an idea has prevailed, with many who have opposed the applications of Dissenters, that the Orthodox among them were *very few*, and that only such as are enemies to the doctrines of the Church, wish for farther relief. But, this is evidently a mistake. Unitarians acknowledge themselves the *minority*. In Birmingham, where the proportion of their number, to the rest of the Dissenters, is greater, than in any other town in the kingdom, the Orthodox, from the best information are nearly three to one. In the county of Essex, there are near fifty Congregations of Dissenters, among which there are scarce *any* Socinians, although a few years back there were two or three Congregations of that description; yet the Dissenters in *this* county are as desirous of a complete toleration as any of their brethren.

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consistent with their grand principle that Christ is the only head of the church, and would be a tacit acknowledgment of the civil magistrate's authority to interfere in matters of religion. If the goodness of the legislature chose to grant them that exemption from some of the civil duties of subjects, which the act allows to those who qualify according to it, they probably would not object to such a declaration as the act contains, if it were appointed *solely* for that purpose, and should not imply that they derived a *right* to preach the gospel, from the *grant* of the civil power.

All this, my Lord, may be considered as a trifle by many, but it is a *very serious* difficulty in the minds of no small number of dissenting Ministers. If it be then a point of conscience with *any*, it is not a trifle to them, nor ought it to be so considered, by a wise and benign legislature. Numbers who are willing to give every proper security for their allegiance, are kept from subscribing by the difficulty here stated. Every such dissenting Minister, stands exposed to the heavy penalties of the Oxford Act, the Conventicle Act, and others passed in the reign of Charles II.* Such persons as speak or write against the trinity, are also liable to the dreadful operation of the statute against blasphemy. Believing, my Lord, the doctrine of the trinity to stand *firm* on Scripture-ground, the last mentioned act appears, in my view, *unnecessary* for its defence, and a *censure* on the truth it was intended

* See Burn's Justice, articles, Dissenters, Dissenting Ministers, and Dissenting Schoolmasters.

to support. Every friend also to the just liberties of mankind, must lament, that such a dishonourable and oppressive restraint should be laid on the *freedom* of inquiry, and the *right* of private judgment*.

Many other persecuting statutes remain in force against the laity amongst Dissenters; and Burn, in the articles quoted, records a case in the twenty-sixth year of the *present reign*, where the penalty of twenty pounds was levied on the Conventicle Act †. While such penal statutes continue unrepealed, how can it be said *with truth*, that “Dissenters are “exempted from every restraint upon religious liberty,” or that they “Enjoy the blessings of a *full* toleration?” Arguments, in the present enlightened age, against such laws, are unnecessary. They are most unrighteous, sanguinary, and intolerant in their principle, and their execution would shock the feelings of humanity. The repeal of *them* is necessary, to a “*Full* toleration,” and religious liberty will always be *incomplete*, while one such penal statute remains in force. There can be no *full* toleration where any are exposed to pains and penalties for *religion only*, and the continuance of such laws is a *disgrace* to a liberal and enlightened nation.

Dissenters therefore, although grateful for the kind intention of the legislature to relieve them by the late act, and for the *actual*, though not *legal* liberty they have enjoyed, intend to request the repeal not only of the Test and Corporation Acts, but

* See Burn's Justice, article, Blasphemy.

† See the sixteenth edition, printed in 1788.

of all penal statutes now in force against them on account of religion. Whenever they may bring forward such a request, may they not hope for the support, not only of all liberal, but of all "conscientious churchmen?" The Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, have given them ground to expect their support. They have declared, "It is the *earnest* wish of this society, in which they are confident they have the concurrence of *all conscientious* churchmen, that the blessings of a *full toleration* should be extended to Christians of *all* Denominations."

The Dissenters, my Lord, in the measures which they have in view to obtain such a repeal, contemplate nothing that can disturb the *peace* of society, nothing that can be *hostile* to the *safety* of the state, or the *security* of the church. They only mean to use the undeniable right of British subjects, to apply to parliament for a redress of grievances, and to present in the most decent and respectful form, their *united* request to the legislature of their country. Whether their request may be granted or not, they will glory in maintaining the spirit and conduct of loyal subjects to the government, and useful members of the community; and should it be refused, the only means they will use, will be to supplicate patiently, the wisdom and liberality of their country, for that justice which is their due. The charge of base or insidious motives, they repel, with that just indignation, which men conscious of their innocence will always feel, against an imputation which is equally *false* and *illiberal*.

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In the supplication they intend, they are persuaded they shall not act contrary to the British constitution, but agreeably to its genius and spirit. Its *wise* and *admirable* design is, to secure the *authority* and *glory* of the crown, the dignity of the peerage, and the *rights* of subjects in general. The repeal of penal statutes in religion, would plant *unfading* laurels round the brow of royalty, reflect honour on the English nobility, and enlarge the just privileges of mankind. If then, the dignitaries of the church, and the meetings of the Clergy, are sincere in their former, or late professions of moderation, they will give the world a decisive proof of it, by promoting the repeal of the obnoxious penal statutes. Those remains of the ignorance and intolerance of former times, can never *grow venerable* by their antiquity. They are deformed protuberances on the body of English law. Their removal would give firmness, beauty, and glory, to the British constitution, would render it more deservedly the admiration, and the envy of Europe, and would constitute this sea-defended isle, the most favoured and happy amongst the nations of the earth.

That such honour may be added to the present mild and auspicious government, and a part of it adorn your Lordship's coronet, is the fervent wish,

My Lord,

Of your humble Servant,

March 1,
1790.

THE AUTHOR.

A P P E N D I X.

I N addition, to what has been advanced, in the preceding Letters, it may not be improper, to obviate two principal objections, which have been urged against the claims of Dissenters, since they were written. Report says, it was asserted, in the late parliamentary discussion, that "Dissenters, " if they acquired power, would exercise it to the " subversion of the established church; and, that " if they acted consistent with their principles as " honest men, they must endeavour to do this." The *repeal* of the Test and Corporation acts, as it would only place them on the ground of *eligibility* to office, would invest them with no power at all, much less with any that could be formidable to the established religion. But, supposing, that in consequence of such a repeal, they might acquire a degree of power formidable *in itself*, they could never exercise *that power* to the injury of the establishment, unless they *departed from their own principles*, and acted upon those principles which are adopted, by the supporters of all human establishments of religion.

Dissenters consider the kingdom of Christ, as *not of this world*. They are persuaded, that it ought

not to be propagated by worldly influence or *power*; that no coercive means are to be used for the spread of religious truth; that every man has a right to judge for himself in matters of religion; that he ought not to be disturbed in the exercise of this right; and that no means, but those of evidence and argument, are to be used, to convince the minds of men. These are their *leading principles*, which form the ground and essence of their dissent; and while they adhere to these principles, it is impossible, that they should attempt, by the exercise of *power*, to injure the religious establishment of their country. Their principles forbid them to injure the rights of others; and oblige them to leave to others, the complete exercise of those rights of conscience, and private judgment, which they claim for themselves. While therefore, the majority of this kingdom approve and support the establishment, it must remain perfectly secure, even if Dissenters acquired the greatest degree of power. And, if there were *no Dissenters*, it is not easy to shew, even on the principles adopted by modern defenders of the church, *why* the establishment of this, or of any country, should be continued longer than it is approved by the majority.

It is not denied indeed, but that Dissenters persuaded of the truth and importance of their own sentiments, would wish, by the force of fair reasoning, to lead others to embrace them. But, in using such means, they would only pursue that line of conduct, which is followed by men of integrity of
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all denominations. Every sincere and zealous episcopalian would doubtless wish, if possible, to convince all Dissenters of the evil of schism, and the danger of separation; and would rejoice to bring them back into the bosom of the church. So, every man who is a Dissenter on principle, would wish to lead others, to entertain the same views of the gospel, and of the kingdom of Christ, as appear important to himself. And, while the Dissenter and the Churchman act *conscientiously*, both are justifiable, in their *rational efforts* at the conviction of mankind. But, farther than the use of *such efforts*, the principles of a Dissenter would not permit *him* to go. As an honest man, he would no doubt, if he were able, persuade all men, that human establishments of religion have no foundation in scripture; but, so far would he be from attempting their subversion by the exercise of POWER, that if one push of his finger, could overturn St. Paul's, or demolish the Vatican, his principles would not allow him to extend his arm for that purpose.

The overthrow of the hierarchy by the Presbyterians, in the reign of Charles the first, cannot in the least invalidate this reasoning. That event was accomplished, by the friends of *one* human establishment, acting against *another*; and the principles of *both*, were equally opposite, to those of the present Dissenters. It is now generally understood, that there are few, or none, of the English *Presbyterians*, who hold the same principles, as to church-government, and the exercise of human

authority in religion, as their ancestors did, in the time of the civil war. The present Dissenters are in general congregationalists*; and no conclusion can be *justly* formed, of what would be their political conduct in power, from what was the political conduct of the puritans. In those times, *all parties* thought it lawful, to use the sword of the magistrate, for the propagation or support of religion. Neither the principles of toleration, nor the rights of conscience were then understood; and, the *Solemn league and covenant*, was as flagrant a violation of the liberties of mankind, as the decrees of the Council of Trent.

The other objection alluded to, in the beginning of this Appendix, is a charge of inconsistency urged against Dissenters, in seeking farther relief, after what was granted to them some years ago. It was said, to have been “Declared at that time, “both in and out of the house, that they meant to “proceed no farther; and, that Dr. Kippis, in his “letter, at the time, upon the subject, said, that “Dissenters only required a toleration in the respect “in question, and that granted they would ask no “more of the legislature.” It might be deemed a sufficient answer to the charge of inconsistency, that the toleration which the Dissenters then asked, *was not fully* granted. There is the authority of the reverend and learned biographer, whose name was mentioned on a late occasion for saying, that the

* See the new edition of Chambers’s Cyclopædia, under the article Presbyterians.

“ Relief was *not granted* in the extent which was desired*.” And it is evident, this is not an opinion which the Doctor has lately formed, but that from the passing of the bill, he has had the same view of the subject. In the circular letter which, as chairman of the committee, he addressed to dissenting ministers, in July 1779, he speaks of the act then newly passed, as what did “ Not come up to those ideas of *complete toleration*, which Dissenters think reasonable and just;” and, as being “ Not the whole of what they wished for, and *sought to gain.*” Seeing therefore, that what they then sought of the legislature was *not granted*, how are they chargeable with inconsistency, if, at any subsequent period, they request what was then denied? The assurance, that no farther application would be made, if it had come from the whole body of Dissenters, must have rested on the condition, that the application they were then making succeeded. As the condition was *not complied with*, the assurance could *not be binding*, and they were still at full liberty, without being *justly* chargeable with inconsistency, to renew their application, whenever they might think it adviseable.

But, the proper answer to this objection, and which fully exculpates Dissenters from the charge contained in it, is, that the language of an individual, however respectable, cannot bind the body of which

* See Dr. Kippis’s Introductory Preface to Fownes’s Enquiry into the Principles of Toleration, the third edition *lately* published.

he is a member, unless he has been authorised by that body, to use such language, with respect to that particular instance. The candour of the respectable writer, who is said to have given the above assurance, will not be offended, when it is observed that, his language on that occasion, ought only to be considered, as the probable opinion of an individual well acquainted with the views and sentiments of the party, concerning which he wrote. As it was not made in name, nor with the authority of the whole body of Dissenters, they certainly could not consider themselves as bound by it, even if the condition on which it depended *had been* fulfilled. But as it was not fulfilled, both Dissenters at large, and the reverend author of the assertion himself, ought to be considered, as free from all obligation of abiding by it.

Such considerations shew, that it is perfectly consistent in Dissenters, to apply for the repeal of penal laws in general, that are in force against them. But, with regard to the late applications, for the repeal of the *Test and Corporation Acts*, there would have been no inconsistency in making *them* even if the former application of their ministers had succeeded in its *full extent*. The objects of the two applications were *distinct*. The former related to the *religious* liberty of the dissenting ministers; the latter to the *civil* liberty of the dissenting laity. And it would be extraordinary reasoning indeed, to say, that, because an application for farther religious liberty

liberty to ministers, was in part successful, therefore, the laity *ought not* to apply for the removal of the restraints, which still lie upon their civil liberty.

Dissenters have never yet come forward as a body, to state the whole of what they apprehend, to be grievances, in the laws respecting them. But, until they do this, and until the wisdom and goodness of the legislature, shall see fit to comply, with their reasonable and just request, as to *civil rights*; and shall sanction with the authority of law, that *religious liberty* which it already grants by connivance, they ought not to be censured, as acting a part, either inconsistent or disrespectful, if they apply for farther relief. And they are persuaded, that the justice, and liberality of Englishmen in general, are too great, to think that any class of subjects among them, ought to labour under grievances, and at the same time, to be denied the liberty of presenting their complaint. Dissenters therefore, while they love and *venerate* the present government, cheerfully commit their cause to the favour of Providence, the gentle operation of time, and the gradual improvement of mankind. As knowledge increases, and their cause is calmly investigated, they doubt not, that the present prejudices entertained against them, will be obviated; that the equity, justice, and *political safety* of their claims, will be seen and acknowledged, by all wise and disinterested men; and, that Britain, under whose fostering care, the tree of liberty has thrived, until
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its refreshing shade has reached into *other* climes, will *not be the last* in the list of nations, to wipe away from her code, the *opprobrium* of penal laws, and to let all her own subjects repose in peace, beneath the shelter of a COMPLETE TOLERATION.

THE END.