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A
FREE and DISPASSIONATE
A C C O U N T
OF THE LATE
A P P L I C A T I O N
OF THE
Protestant Dissenting Ministers
TO
P A R L I A M E N T.

[Price SIXPENCE.]

11/10/1918

THE SECRETARY

WAR OFFICE

WINDSOR

[Signature]

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A P P L I C A T I O N
OF THE
Protestant Dissenting Ministers
TO
P A R L I A M E N T.
IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.
By SAMUEL STENNETT, D.D.

L O N D O N:
Printed for J. BUCKLAND, in Pater-noster-Row;
G. KEITH, in Grace-Church-Street; and
W. HARRIS, in St. Paul's Church-Yard.

MDCCLXXII.

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ACCOUNT, &c.

S I R,

AS I know you have been a hearty well-wisher to the success of the late application to Parliament, upon a firm persuasion that the grounds of it are most just and honourable, and that an enlarged Toleration hath a direct tendency to promote the interests of truth and religion; I do not wonder you are surprized at the strange misrepresentations of the design of this business, and the manner of conducting it, which, from various motives, have been industriously circulated among your acquaintance.

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THE

THE Question, you are sensible, wholly rests upon the general principles of Liberty, and hath no respect to particular sentiments controverted among Christians. And indeed it is of so simple a nature, that the friends of it are heartily willing to submit the merits of the case to the sentence of any honest man, who possesses a plain understanding, and the common feelings of humanity. It however too often happens that the plainest question, placed in a false light, becomes through prejudice a matter of warm debate. Not that I apprehend, Sir, the measures which have been taken to confound the Question before us, have had any very great effect, except to hold some few worthy persons in a state of neutrality to it: a mistake of which those persons may, I think, notwithstanding be pretty easily convinced.

To that end you will give me leave to state, in as clear a manner as I am able, the object and grounds of the late
 I application

application of the Dissenting Ministers to Parliament—to give you a short narrative of their proceedings—and then to leave it with you, and every honest man, to judge, whether a Dissenter, especially one of those religious principles you and I profess, is not highly censurable for opposing this design; greatly to blame for being neutral towards it; and in every view worthy of commendation for promoting it to the utmost of his power, so far as consists with prudence, decency, and a probability of success?

THE object of the late application to Parliament, was to obtain a legal security for Protestant Dissenting Ministers against those penalties to which such of them are liable, as cannot conscientiously comply with the terms of the Toleration Act; and also to obtain relief for Tutors and Schoolmasters from those oppressive laws to which they are exposed, and from the inconveniences which they do actually suffer, in endeavouring

vouring from time to time to get the natural course of those laws obstructed.

THE penal laws against Dissenting Ministers are very severe. "They are not to come or be, unless in passing upon the road, within five miles of any city or town corporate, or borough that sends burgessees to parliament; or within five miles of any parish, town, or place, where they have taken upon them to preach; upon forfeiture, for every such offence, of the sum of forty pounds; one third to the King, another third to the poor of the parish, and another to him that shall sue for it." And if such person keep a school, he shall forfeit likewise, for every such offence, "forty pounds; and any two justices of the peace may, upon oath made of any of these offences, commit such offender for six months without bail or main-prize." They are also liable, on conviction upon oath of two witnesses, before one or more justices of the peace, of having preached;

preached; for the first offence, to a penalty of twenty pounds; and for every such offence afterwards, to a penalty of forty pounds. And by another act, for every such offence they are liable to suffer three months imprisonment in the common jail, without bail or mainprize. And every time they administer the Lord's Supper, they are liable to a penalty of one hundred pounds; one moiety to go to the King, another moiety to be divided between the poor of the parish, and such person or persons as shall sue for the same by action of debt, bill, plaint, or information in any court of record, wherein noessoign, protection, or wager of law shall be allowed.

As to Tutors and Schoolmasters, they are obliged "before the Archbishop, Bishop, or Ordinary of the diocese, to subscribe a declaration, that they will conform to the liturgy of the Church of England, as by law established," on

pain of forfeiting their schools, and being utterly disabled, and, ipso facto, deprived of the same. And if they instruct or teach youth in any private house or family, before licence obtained from the Archbishop, Bishop, or Ordinary of the diocese, and subscribing the above-mentioned declaration, they are “for the first offence to suffer three months imprisonment, without bail; and, for every subsequent offence, besides the like imprisonment for three months, to forfeit five pounds to the King.” It is also by another act made “unlawful for any person, who does not frequent divine service established by the laws of this kingdom, and carry him or herself reverently, decently and orderly there, to teach any publick or private school, or take any boarders, or tablers, that are taught or instructed by him or herself, or any other; upon pain for every such offence, to forfeit the sum of forty pounds*.”

* See the case of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers and Schoolmasters.

IT were needless, Sir, to point out to you, or to any man, in these times, wherein the principles of religious liberty are so generally understood, the injustice and inhumanity of these laws. Nay there are few, I suppose, but will admit that they are as contrary to every maxim of sound policy in a commercial state, as they are to the spirit of the Christian Religion. Yet these statutes remain unrepealed. All Dissenters therefore are disabled by law from acting in the capacity of Tutors or Schoolmasters; nor do they act as such but under connivance. The case is indeed different as to their Ministers. The Toleration Act, which was passed just after the ever-memorable Revolution in 1688, has exempted those of them from the penalties just recited, who subscribe the doctrinal articles of the Church of England; but as to such who do not subscribe those articles, the penal laws remain in full force against them.

Now the present state of Protestant Dissenting Ministers is this. Many of them do not hold several doctrines contained in the articles; others do believe them in the main, but not every part of them; and a considerable number of them do readily assent to them all: and some of these last, as well as the others, cannot conscientiously subscribe the articles, as they apprehend the Civil Magistrate's requiring subscription to explanatory articles of faith, to be an invasion on the rights of conscience, and the sole authority of Christ as King in his Church. So that the fact is, many cannot subscribe, and few, comparatively speaking, have subscribed. Now, will any one say, that persons thus circumstanced, are guilty of any crime in not complying with the terms of the Toleration Act, or that for such conduct they really merit the vengeance denounced on them in the above-mentioned statutes?

BUT

BUT it has been said, "Where is the grievance, seeing these laws are not carried into execution? Is it not time enough to complain, when you actually do suffer for the sake of conscience?" It is readily acknowledged, such is the unreasonableness and cruelty of these laws, such the lenity of the present Government, and such the moderation of the Bishops, that the Dissenters are under no apprehensions of prosecutions being begun by, or receiving any countenance from authority. Yet, the existence of laws contrary to every idea of reason, justice and humanity, is itself a grievance; and must give pain to generous minds, especially to those, who, though peaceable subjects and guilty of no offence against the State, are liable to suffer by them. Not to say what ill use may be made of these laws in terrorem, on certain occasions, to oblige men to a conduct not strictly conformable to their own idea of truth and justice. Besides, real grievances
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there have been, and frequently are in the case of Tutors and Schoolmasters, who have been proceeded against in the spiritual courts, till by the favour of the Bishops, or by a Noli-prosequi from the Crown upon the removal of such causes into the temporal courts, these prosecutions have been stopped. To which I will add, that however disposed Government may be, and actually is, to hold back the rod of persecution; yet it may so happen that *that* friendly office may not be in their power. For, as the reward the law offers to the prosecutor, particularly in one instance, may be likely enough to stimulate malicious and avaritious persons to that odious business, so, such persons becoming entitled to these wages of iniquity, and legally demanding them, a Noli-prosequi from the Crown cannot set aside their suit.

BUT, admitting that there is little probability of any thing of this sort in
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our time, who shall say what changes may take place hereafter? And when Government becomes itself disposed to persecute, every one sees, it will not be a time to implore its assistance for the removing persecuting laws. At that sad period, should it ever arrive, what would posterity say of us had we indolently neglected suing for relief when many were of opinion, and upon good grounds, that there was a reasonable prospect of obtaining it? Some, indeed, have said, that when the State becomes disposed to persecute, even a legal security is but a feeble one against it. But that security is, under Providence, the best which the mutable condition of all worldly affairs will admit. And a perfect Toleration, such as true policy, humanity and religion dictate, once passed into a law, and that in consequence of a full, free and accurate discussion of the matter; I say such a Toleration would be a fence against tyranny, which neither the arts
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nor influence of persecution would easily destroy.

THE great object then was to obtain a legal security against the penal laws. But this could only be done by taking off the subscription required by the Toleration Act to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England, and by substituting in the room of it a declaration of our belief of the Holy Scriptures. To which it was foreseen there would arise objections from two quarters; though it was hoped those objections would be easily removed, as it would be found upon reflection that they have little weight in them, however capable of being so disguised as to hurt many serious minds.

SOME persons, it was judged, would have their difficulties about joining in a petition to be excused from subscribing to the articles, as apprehending it *absurd* for those to do so who could subscribe;

scribe ; *sinful*, as it would betray in them an indifference to the doctrines contained in the articles ; and *dangerous*, as the success of the petition might prove an occasion of the greater spread of error. These objections, it was apprehended, were pregnant with such injurious reflections on the principles of those that might possibly through weakness urge them, that it was scarce imaginable they would make any deep impression, except on a very few.

THOUGH a man can himself subscribe, it is not surely *absurd* in him to pray that neither himself nor others may be compelled to do so by the terror of fines and imprisonments. On the contrary, to withhold such prayer, (when the withholding it may have a considerable influence to prevent the success of the application) is in effect to persecute. But if it be said, " Let the penal laws be repealed ; that may be done, without our praying for the taking off the subscription : " I answer, the repealing the penal laws
would

would be taking off the subscription ; for the repeal of the penal laws would be a total annihilation of that part of the Toleration Act which requires subscription. So that whoever says, it is *absurd* for those who can and do subscribe, to pray that others may not be obliged to subscribe in order to their escaping the penalties of preceding Statutes ; that man says in other words, that it is *absurd* to pray that men may not suffer for conscience sake.

AND this being the case, the objection that it is *sinful* for Calvinists to join in a petition to take off the subscription, as it would express an indifference to the doctrinal principles they hold, falls of course. No indifference is hereby expressed to those principles ; but on the contrary rather a jealousy for their honour, that they may not be understood to be, what they really are not, persecuting principles. Besides, the state in which the success of the late application would have left one who is zealous for
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those principles, would have been equally as favourable to his wish of publicly declaring his sentiments, as that he is now in : for it would have left him at full liberty to declare his faith, and to contend for it, where, when, and in what manner he pleased.

NOR is the last objection less futile, that it would be *dangerous* to join in such a petition, as the success of it might prove an occasion of the greater spread of error. Indeed, Sir, he who thus reasons, be his religious principles what they may, pays a very ill compliment to them. Sure I am the gospel of Jesus Christ wants not the support of the sword. It was not first propagated in the world by such means, nor has it ever since courted them. THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE ARE NOT CARNAL, BUT SPIRITUAL. Nay I may venture to affirm, that the tribute of worldly splendor and magnificence which the civil power officiously presented at the shrine of Christianity,

tianity, when it first became the established religion, tended infinitely more to disgrace and impoverish it, than all the insults that have been offered to it by persecution. A quiet peaceable possession of the gifts of Providence, is a blessing which every good man would wish others who differ from him may enjoy as well as himself. And so far will he be from apprehending any danger to the truth, from the opportunity which such a state of security will give men freely to utter their objections to it; that he will reasonably expect the greatest advantages to it. Nobly disdain-
 ing all foreign worldly support, and trusting in the armour of righteousness, he will gladly meet the enemy where, when, and how he will: he will generously give him every external advantage he can desire, and not doubt but, through God and the arguments of his word, he shall prevail against all the powerful opposition of error and sin. But on the contrary, the moment he
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flies to the sword in defence of his religious principles, or fondly hopes to obtain security for them behind the barriers of worldly emoluments or penalties which others may raise about him; that moment, I say, he loses sight of the grand object, he betrays a want of confidence in Christ the great Head of the church, he violates his oath of allegiance to his Sovereign, he induces a suspicion in others that the truth is not on the side of those doctrines for which he contends, in short he weakly, if not treacherously, abandons them to the insult of opposers.

AND now to apply this to the matter before us. Is the taking off the subscription, and thereby freeing persons of the opposite sentiments from a liability to suffer for those sentiments, is this to be considered as giving them any undue advantage, or opening the way for the spread of error? If the general reasoning now used be just, it is not. Besides, notwithstanding the present re-

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straint of the laws, we do see that men shun not to declare their opinions, be they ever so erroneous, or contrary to the word of God. And whoever is at all acquainted with human nature, and the history of this country, must know that opposition irritates, and that the readiest way to promote any religious tenet, is to subject the patrons and defenders of it to temporal pains and penalties. The objection therefore, that the success of the late application to Parliament would have been injurious to the truth, and that of consequence it would be *dangerous* for the friends of it, to give it their support; is you see, Sir, totally groundless.

BUT, as it was foreseen that some would have their difficulties about taking off the subscription, so likewise that others might possibly object to the making a declaration of their belief of the Scriptures in the room of it. Indeed, to the matter of such declaration no one among

among the Dissenting Ministers could have any objection of conscience, since they are all agreed in the divinity of the Scriptures. Nor could those among them who are most jealous of an imposing power in matters of religion, consider the requiring such declaration in the same exceptionable light, as the requiring explanatory articles of faith, however true; since the former is a *divine*, the latter a *human* test. Some nevertheless might apprehend that the making even this declaration, in order to obtain a legal security against penal laws, would imply in it an acknowledgment that the Civil Magistrate hath a right to abridge men, otherwise good subjects, of their natural claims, for not conforming to a declaration of faith he imposes. But this does not appear: it would indeed imply an acknowledgment of the Civil Magistrate's power, but not of his right. A compliance therefore with the requisition of Legislature in this instance, could scarce be

supposed to affect the conscience of any Dissenting Minister. But, however desirable it might be for the sake of religious liberty in general, and of those who disbelieve Christianity, that no declaration of their faith at all should be required, this they foresaw was a point not to be obtained. Wherefore the whole business they concluded would be reduced to this short question—Whether, by making a declaration of their belief of the Scriptures, they should secure to themselves a reasonable prospect of obtaining a more enlarged Toleration than that they enjoy at present? or, by refusing to make such declaration, forego all hope of success? And it was imagined no one among the Dissenting Ministers, would hesitate a moment upon the answer to be given to this question.

UPON this general view of the matter, it will scarce be thought strange that the Dissenting Ministers should, many of them, a long while since, have had this
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great object in view. An object to which their attention was naturally directed, by a love of liberty; by the reasonings to which they had been accustomed upon this subject; by a concern for the welfare of posterity; and above all by a wish, that conscience, whether well or ill informed, might have a secure asylum, to which on all occasions it might peaceably retreat, without the embarrassments of any worldly considerations whatever.

A few of these Ministers, who yet were differently minded as to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and some of them qualified according to the Toleration Act, did communicate their thoughts upon these matters to each other; and were of opinion, that the present was the proper time for applying to Legislature on this interesting concern. If they were mistaken, it was their unhappiness. But what induced this apprehension was,—the general

ral regards to the interests of religious liberty, which seemed to prevail now more than ever among all denominations of Protestants;—the favourable light in which the question respecting the Dissenting Ministers struck some persons in the House of Commons, when the late petition from the Clergy of the Church of England was discussed there, and who yet did not approve of that petition;—their firm persuasion of the disposition of Government, to allow men all reasonable liberty in matters of religion;—their idea of the moderation of the reverend bench of Bishops;—and above all, a consideration of the honour which they judged this measure would reflect on the Church of England, as it would express a generous concern for the consciences of those without the Church, and at the same time would not infer a necessity of making any alteration within it, but rather justify a steady maintenance of that uniformity
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of doctrine, which may be thought of great importance in an establishment.

THEY were aware, indeed, that on some accounts it might be deemed an improper time, or however, that it would be so represented by those who were averse to the design. It would be insinuated, from the Dissenting Ministers applying so immediately after the petitioning Clergy, that there was an understanding between the leaders in each business, and that the two affairs were parts of one scheme, artfully concerted to strike at the foundation of the great doctrines of the Reformation, and by pulling down the fences of the Church, to lay it open to insult and confusion; as also, still farther to foment the political disputes which have so long and so unhappily prevailed among us. But they hoped that these insinuations, should they be thrown out, would have little effect, as every one must upon the least reflection perceive, that the two cases

of the Dissenting Ministers and the Clergy stand upon very different grounds, and that the admitting the petition of the former would by no means imply an *obligation* upon Legislature to admit that of the latter. Wherefore, relying on the merits of the case itself, the integrity of their views, and the candour of those in authority, they presumed they should escape the imputation of any design to distress either the Church or the State, by giving aid to the enemies of the one or the other: a conduct, which they can with great truth affirm, was the farthest from their intention. And then they reflected, that it was scarce probable any time would arise, in which those who are indisposed to a measure of this sort, would not be of opinion, or at least would not wish to have it so understood, that *occasion* is against it.

UPON a consultation of these few Ministers, immediately after the debate
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in the House of Commons upon the petition of the Clergy, which debate some of them heard; it was agreed, that it was highly eligible to obtain the benefit of the present disposition of the House, and petition for that relief which they had so long desired, and had been waiting for a proper opportunity to obtain. But it naturally occurred to them, that there was not time to obtain the assistance of their brethren in the country, and make it so general a concern as they wished it to be, before the last day of receiving petitions would be over. It was therefore apprehended, they should scarce be able to apply during the present Session. However, they resolved to call a meeting of their brethren in and about London, to consider of the best means to pursue this great design, and to choose a Committee for that purpose: and accordingly issued printed summons's for Thursday, March the fifth.

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IN the interval, some others of the London Ministers appointed a meeting of the General Body for the Wednesday. At that meeting, which consisted of fifty persons, intimations were given of the favourable disposition of Government; which intelligence, was stated in such a manner, as to leave no ground of blame upon those who gave it, nor any imputation of failure of promise in those to whom it related. Accordingly the following resolutions were put to the vote, and objected to by one person only—That the taking off the subscription required of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, and the obtaining relief for Tutors and School-masters, are very desirable and important objects; —That a Committee of fifteen persons be chosen to concert and pursue such measures, and to make such applications, as may be necessary to carry these purposes into execution; and —That the Committee be empowered to convene the General Body as occasion may require.

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A Committee out of the three Denominations was immediately chosen. And the day following about twenty Ministers, who were not present at the Wednesday's meeting, signified to the Chairman of the Committee their approbation of the design. So that sixty-nine out of ninety-five (the number of which the list of approved Ministers in and about London consists) were consenting to these resolutions. * To which I will add, that at the subsequent meetings, the greatest number of hands held up against any one question proposed, was only six. The very general concurrence therefore of the Body of London Ministers in this measure, was a circumstance which, so far as it might be supposed to add weight to the merits of the question itself, afforded a happy omen of success.

* It is clearly apprehended that there are not ten Ministers upon the list, who disapprove of the object of this application : and it is firmly believed, from the intelligence already received, that there is a general concurrence of the Ministers in the country.

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THE Committee immediately applied themselves to the important business entrusted to them. Their case was laid before the principal Governors of the Church, and it was hoped from their Grace's known candour, and the favourable light in which the first mention of this affair had struck them, that they were not in a disposition to oppose the measure. But they quickly understood the contrary from the reasonings of one of the Noble Prelates, who, in a conference with some of the Ministers, freely declared his dislike to this application, at the same time treating them with condescension and respect. They, however, still hoped that their Lordships would on reflection see, that as the matter of the Dissenting Ministers request, was founded in reason and equity, so that upon the soundest principles of policy, no inconvenience would result to the Church from admitting it. They therefore pursued their object, with all that attention and earnestness which they judged its importance demanded, and thought

thought they should give no occasion of offence to any, whilst they used their utmost endeavours, without regard to any political distinctions whatsoever, to possess every Member of Legislature with a true idea of their case, resting at the same time their hope of success upon the merits of it.

At the motion of Sir Henry Hoghton, whose zeal for his own principles as a Dissenter, and whose firmness and prudence in the management of this business, will reflect a real honour on his character, leave was given by the House of Commons to bring in a bill for the farther relief of his Majesty's Protestant Subjects Dissenting from the Church of England; and a Committee appointed to prepare it. A Bill was accordingly framed, to every clause of which the Committee of Ministers gave the utmost attention, anxious to escape the imputation of having gone beyond their instructions, or of having acceded to any thing, which upon the maturest reflection did

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not appear to them necessary to the obtaining the great end of this application to Parliament. Had time, indeed, and the circumstances of the case admitted of it, they would have been happy in more frequently consulting the General Body upon every step they took. They were enabled, however, pretty quickly to report the success it met with in the House of Commons. The question, after having been more than once very largely and solemnly discussed there, was carried by a great majority. And, as the Dissenting Ministers are highly obliged to those very respectable Members, who supported their cause with such remarkable zeal and force of reason; so they are not insensible of the honour done their characters by those Gentlemen who thought fit to oppose it.

Their Bill, indeed, met with very different fate in the House of Lords, but not, it is presumed, upon any considerations that do at all affect the merits of it. They promise themselves therefore,
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amidst the disappointment they feel, that the time may come when their Lordships may be of opinion, that none of those religious or civil inconveniences are likely to result from this measure, which have now determined them against it. And at that time, they are persuaded from their Lordships aversion to the spirit of the penal laws, that they will readily concur with those distinguished Characters, who so warmly pleaded for a legal security against them; and with the two great Ornaments of the law, who did the Dissenters the honour to divide with them.

IT is indeed regretted that their Lordships should any of them be misled, in a point of such pleasing consequence to the Dissenters as the general concurrence of their Ministers in this application, by representations so contrary to the facts already stated, and which are of publick notoriety. But, they flatter themselves,

though these misrepresentations have had their unhappy effect, yet the unfavourable impressions they first made upon their Lordships minds, are now removed. And, how much soever they may be afflicted with the event, they hope the firmness and temper with which they endure it, will convince the world that they have not been moved by factious principles, but by a sincere regard to Liberty and the Rights of Conscience. And should the world in general be convinced of this, all wise men, they do not doubt, will acknowledge that the political inconveniences apprehended from granting them their request, and which proved the grand obstructions to it, had really no other existence but in imagination.

AND now, the grounds of this business having been stated, and the proceedings therein laid before you, I leave it to you, Sir, to judge in the first place, in what light the conduct of the

the Committee, and of those who have been the most active in this affair, is to be considered. The Committee, it is acknowledged, is composed of persons of very different religious sentiments: and it was natural to expect it should, as they were appointed by a body of men who themselves answer to that description. As however the affair entrusted to their management, was founded *solely* upon the general principle of Liberty, and not upon the supposed truth or falsehood of any points of faith, a happy unanimity hath prevailed among them. They have been perfectly agreed in the object, and in the mode of proceeding; and can truly affirm that they have been anxious to keep the grand question upon its proper footing, and to avoid what might have a tendency to bring on disputes of a religious kind. There is not one among them, but would wish to have his religious sentiments understood to be favourable to that Liberty, which they are imploring of Legislature:

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nor is there one, I imagine, among the Dissenting Ministers in general who would avow the contrary of this concerning his own principles. How is it then conceivable that any should blame the Committee for their zeal in prosecuting this affair? I have the honour, Sir, to be one of that Committee; and without vanity I think I may say, their zeal is highly commendable. Nay, I will add, the man who ventures to say the contrary, if there be any force in the reasoning of this Letter, lays himself open to the suspicion of bigotry and intolerance.

INDEED the questions as to expedience of time and mode of application, are of very different consideration. These are submitted to your judgment, Sir, upon the general state of facts now laid before you; as are also the prudence, fidelity and diligence of the Committee, in the discharge of the painful and important service devolved upon them. If, by undertaking this service and pursuing it
with

with vigour, they have any of them acted inconsistently with their religious principles, or given an undue advantage to error and false doctrine; if they have once lost sight of the grand point; if they have aimed to kindle the flames of a religious war, and to break the bands of union and friendship which have so long subsisted among the Dissenters; if they have wantonly abused the power with which they were entrusted, or wilfully gone beyond the instructions given them; in short, if they have not acquitted themselves to the best of their judgments and abilities, let them suffer the blame they deserve. But, if the contrary shall appear to have been their conduct, as they will have the approbation of their own consciences, so they need not doubt of the hearty commendation of all wise and good men.

THE next question I have to submit to your judgment, Sir, upon the view given you of this subject, is the conduct of

those few Ministers who have been neutral towards it. When I say neutral, I scarce know how to admit the idea of indifference in a matter of such importance as this. Is there a man, Sir, that can reason after so strange a manner as to say, that because the Toleration Act has provided for his safety, he has no occasion to trouble himself about the safety of others? I am not willing to suppose it, because such reasoning would reflect great dishonour upon that man, and what is much worse, upon those principles which he securely professes and teaches under that Toleration. No, Sir; they who firmly believe the doctrines professed by the first Reformers, and have entered into the genuine spirit of those doctrines, I am well persuaded are not capable of such meanness. By the neutrality therefore I would blame, though not confidently censure, I mean a doubtfulness which side to take in this affair, proceeding from considerations either of *Conscience* or *Prudence*.

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PLAIN as the question appears to you and me, I can imagine it possible that it may be so misrepresented by some, as to affect the *Consciences* of others. The friends of Calvinism may be told, that by joining in an application to Parliament to take off the subscription, they would express a criminal indifference to their own principles, if not be guilty of an open disavowal of them; and that by such conduct, they would become instrumental to the spreading the opposite sentiments. Nor is it to be thought strange that, not immediately perceiving the weakness of this reasoning, they should hesitate a while upon the part they had to act: no, nor ought this hesitation of theirs to be imputed to a spirit of intolerance. Convinced however, as I think upon a very little reflection they must be, that these insinuations are totally groundless, it might naturally be expected, that instead of remaining any longer neuter, they should feel themselves impelled by every

motive of justice, humanity, and religion, to afford all the assistance in their power to so good a cause.

BUT it has been asserted, that this application originated in a zealous attachment to the contrary principles: a fact which, as it has been repeatedly denied, ought not to be admitted merely upon a consideration that persons of this character are most nearly interested in the success of it. Supposing however it were a fact, that fact would not at all affect the merits of the case itself. It is a question not of Principles, but of Liberty. Be a man's sentiments therefore what they may, and be the persons who first took up this affair, or have been most active in promoting it, who they may; he who understands the principles of religious Liberty, and is well affected to them, must be a hearty friend to this cause. Such an one will not, cannot forget that the truth, wherever it lies, is so far from being likely to suffer by
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men's being legally exempted from a liability to fines and imprisonments for their religious opinions, that there is no doubt but it will gain ground thereby. Besides, it is a grateful office to an ingenuous mind, to become an advocate on behalf of an adversary, in a matter wherein the rights of conscience are concerned. And he who takes upon him this office, instead of being suspected of a want of zeal for the principles he holds, will not fail to be considered by all wise and thoughtful persons, as the best friend to those principles. It is therefore to be regretted that *any* among us should, by an injudicious timorous neutrality, forego the noble opportunity they had of doing honour to those sentiments they firmly believe and sincerely love.

THIS reasoning, Sir, I own, strikes me in so strong a manner, that I am sometimes ready to persuade myself, that the neutrality of the few per-

sons I have in my eye, could not be owing to considerations of Conscience. And, if I am right in that apprehension, I must impute their conduct to considerations of *Prudence*; that is, to their doubts concerning the success of this application, and their apprehensions of some disagreeable consequences that might attend the failure of it. But, had these Gentlemen reflected, that it was become a point with some to apply to Parliament, and that that resolution was made publick;—had they reflected that there were reasonable grounds to apprehend the application would succeed;—and had they farther reflected, that nothing was so likely to prejudice the success of it, as an idea that the Dissenters were not agreed upon this question of Liberty; had they, I say, duly reflected on these things, they would have been convinced, that a hearty concurrence on their part would have been as prudent, as it would certainly have been generous and honourable.

able. Hereby they would have effectually prevented the very appearance of disunion among ourselves, as well as perhaps secured the success of the object; or if the design had not succeeded, and any disagreeable consequences had followed, the blame thereof would not, could not have fallen upon them.

BUT there is another prudential consideration, which had it been attended to, could not methinks have failed to secure the hearty concurrence of those upon whose conduct I am now animadverting. The time may come when the articles of the Church of England may be revised and altered; and it is strongly affirmed by some, that a scheme of that sort is now in contemplation. Nor is it to be doubted, if that scheme should take place, that an Arminian turn will be given to the established doctrines. In which case, should an uniformity in regard of doctrinal principles be still judged necessary between the Church
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and the Dissenters, such Ministers as are Calvinists will probably become liable to those very penalties, from which persons of the contrary sentiments are now praying for a legal exemption. In this situation, they will doubtless wish to have the subscription taken off; and to that end endeavour, upon the principles of Liberty common to us all, to obtain the concurrence of their Dissenting Brethren in general. But if they should be told in return, "We cannot join you in this application, as we apprehend it to have originated in a zeal for your peculiar principles, and not in a concern for the interests of Liberty;" should they, I say, receive this answer, what reply would those persons make, who have been neutral upon the present occasion? —

THERE is one circumstance farther which I had almost forgotten, but which you will give me leave, Sir, to take some notice of, as it had an effect,
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though without reason, to beget coolness to the design: I mean an apprehension that the Testimonial required in the proposed Bill would preclude some Ministers from a possibility of qualifying, or at least render their obtaining a qualification extremely difficult. This apprehension will, I am persuaded, upon reflection be found to be totally groundless. As to *persons of a good moral and Christian Character*, and of whom it may be affirmed that they are *Protestant Dissenting Ministers*, no difficulty surely could lie in their way of becoming qualified. For how is it conceivable, that a man answering to this description should be so obscure, unconnected, and friendless, as not to be able to procure a certificate to this effect from three persons already qualified according to law, in one or other of the three Denominations of Dissenters throughout the kingdom? And as no discretionary power at all would have been lodged in the Magistrate, the Magistrate would have been obliged

obliged to admit the certificate, whatever opinion he might have of the persons certifying. If, indeed, he had any prejudice against the person applying, or were at all apprehensive that he was an impostor, he might put him to the inconvenience of producing the legal proofs of the qualifications of the three persons certifying for him: but this would be all the trouble he could give him. So that, you see, no Dissenting Minister would have had the least reason to apprehend his liberty in a more precarious state under the proposed Act, than under that which is now in force: on the contrary, he might justly apprehend it in a more secure state, because the certificate would bring the matter to a point with the Magistrate, and not allow him to hesitate a moment whether the person proposing for qualification were within the eye of the law.

BUT, it hath been said, there are persons in such a state, as that a conscientious

ous man would scarce know how to certify that he *receives and acknowledges* them as *Protestant Dissenting Ministers*; though at the same time he might think them well able to instruct others, and therefore heartily wish them to enjoy the same legal security with himself. To this the answer is extremely natural, that if persons are not Dissenters, it can scarce be thought strange that provision is not made for them in an Act designed for the benefit of Dissenters. But it is to be remembred, that the generality of those referred to have no objection to the qualifying themselves as Dissenting Ministers. And if they can and do profess themselves of this character, they surely who are warmly attached to them, are not likely to have any scruple of conscience about saying that for them, which they scruple not to say for themselves. Besides, admitting that this mode of qualifying would embarrass those persons, which yet I am confident it would not, the same embarrassment,

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and I think in a greater degree, attends their case under the Toleration Act as it now stands. So that you see, Sir, there is no weight in this objection : and yet what use has been made of it to prejudice the grand object I need not tell you. A good mind may be easily hurt by the false light in which an innocent and proper measure may be placed, and while it remains under the influence of such impression may think itself obliged to a neutral behaviour towards a useful and important design. But they who wilfully place it in that light, in order to mislead others, scarce leave it in the power of charity to devise an excuse for their unhappy conduct.

I HAVE now, Sir, only to add a word or two concerning their conduct who have thought fit to oppose this application to Parliament. Their motive, I apprehend, must have been a dislike either to the *Object* or the *Mode* of the application. The former I am unwilling

ling to suppose, as it would evidently involve these Gentlemen in the guilt of intolerance. A kind of guilt, however, which they are vehemently to be suspected of, be they who they may, who by the most ungenerous and clandestine measures did their utmost to obstruct the progress of the Bill.

I RATHER hope therefore the persons referred to meant only to object to that *Mode* of application which the General Body had adopted, that is, to the petitioning Legislature *to take off the subscription*, in order to the obtaining for those aggrieved a legal security against the penal laws. But this ground of opposition, though it may exculpate them from the charge of intolerance, puts it out of my power to pay that compliment to their understandings, which I should otherwise have thought they might claim. A man of the plainest sense surely must see, that the joining in a petition to take off a subscription to articles

of faith enforced by the sanctions of fines and imprisonment, does by no means imply a disbelief of those articles, or an unwillingness to make a free and publick profession of them. They, indeed, who disbelieve those articles, or who for other reasons cannot conscientiously subscribe them, are chiefly concerned in such petition. But the man who can and does subscribe, if he apprehends the continuance of the subscription is any way injurious to the civil and religious rights of his neighbour, MAY and OUGHT on that account to pray for its removal. And to infer from his so doing that he is indifferent to his own principles, or that he considers the acknowledgment of them as a grievance, is the reasoning either of a very mistaken judgment, or of a very malignant heart.

IF, indeed, a way could be contrived by which the object of the late application to Parliament might be attained, and

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at the same time those who think it their duty to declare their faith to the Magistrate, might still be held under the obligation of law to do so; there would be some appearance of reason in an opposition from those persons to the measure that has been adopted. But how this could be, I am at a loss to conceive. An expedient, however, has been proposed, which, if I rightly understand it, amounts to this, "Let the law remain in full force to oblige men to subscribe; and let a clause be added to excuse those from the penalties of that law, who do not chuse to conform to it." As therefore the grand end proposed could only be attained by taking off the subscription, no reasonable objection could lie against that *Mode* of application.

WHAT then should induce these Gentlemen to oppose this just and good design? Is it a zeal for the great doc-

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trines of Christianity? This surely is the most unhappy way of expressing that zeal. True, those doctrines have of late been opposed with a warmth, as indecent in the opinion of many, as it has been imprudent. You and I, Sir, feel pain for this opposition. But would we wish to make reprisals on these men, by denying them their natural claims? No, we have other ways of expressing our resentments. We will become suitors for them in matters wherein the rights of conscience are concerned. We will generously afford them every assistance we are capable of to escape persecution: we will pray that they may be placed securely beyond the reach of persecution. And while we do so, we will defend the cause of our Divine Master, with the weapons he has put into our hands; and with a meekness and firmness too, that shall convince all around us, that we hold our principles upon the ground of Scrip-

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ture and reason, and that there is no
alliance between Christianity and the
Sword.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

S. S.

F I N I S.