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A  
PERSUASIVE  
TO  
CONFORMITY,

Address'd to the  
DISSENTERS.

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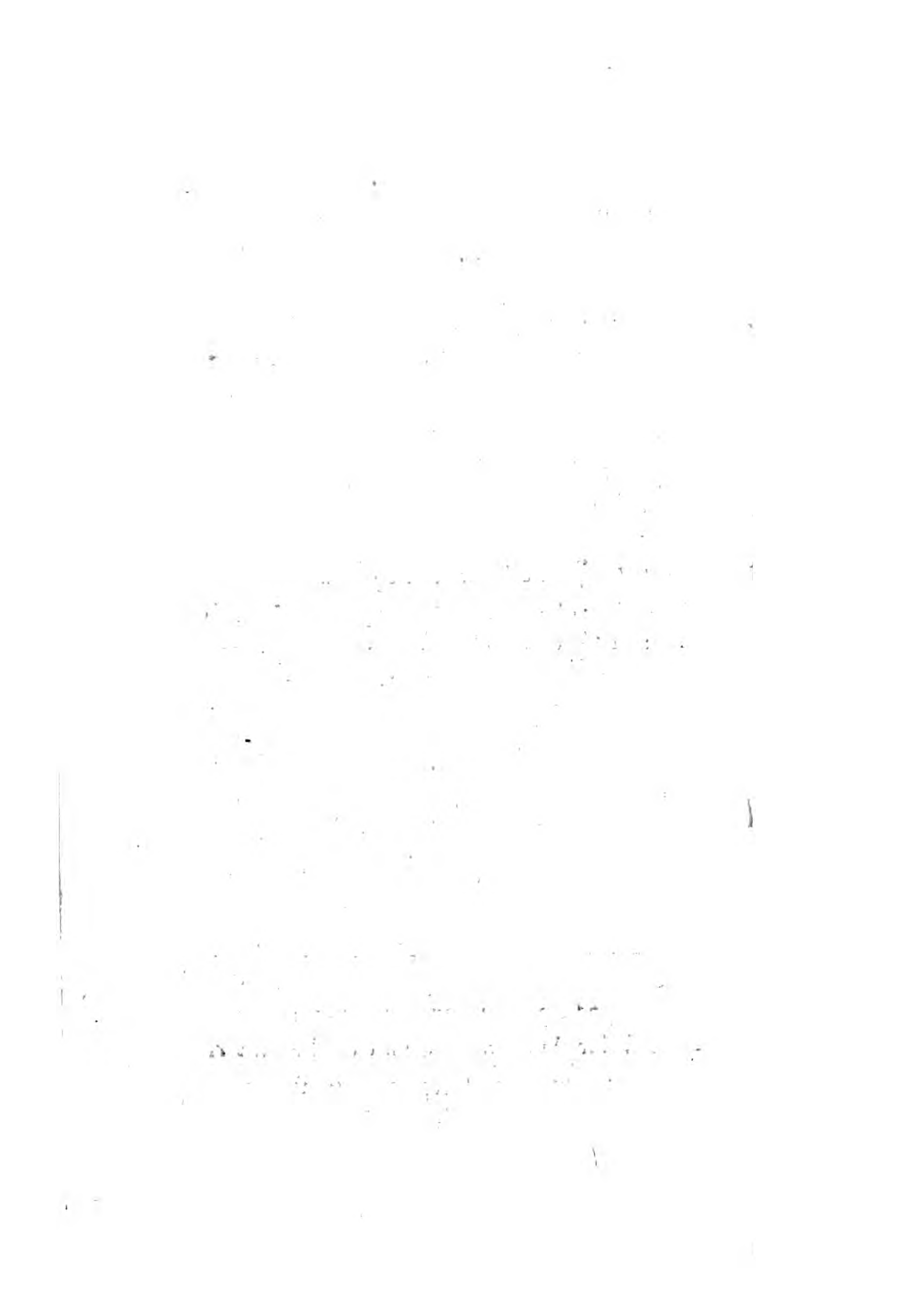
By *J. ROGERS, D. D.*  
Late Vicar of *St. Giles's Cripplegate*, Sub-Dean  
and Canon of *Wells*, and Chaplain in  
Ordinary to his MAJESTY.

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A  
P E R S U A S I V E  
T O  
C O N F O R M I T Y,  
Address'd to the DISSENTERS.

BRETHREN;



Think it my Duty, not only to offer my daily Prayers to God for your Salvation, but also, according to my Abilities, to direct you in the Paths that lead to it. I look upon you as a part of Christ's Flock committed to my Charge, and for whom I must render an Account to my great Master, and I pray God, I may be able to do it with Joy both to my Self and You. They who have attended the Publick Worship in my Parish - Church have not, I hope, wanted any proper Means of Instruction; but you having withdrawn your selves from that Assembly, I make Choice of this way of addressing you, and beg leave to set before

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you, with all Meekness, some Considerations which I think very nearly concern your Souls.

That Concord and Union among Christians is a Gospel-Duty, no one can doubt, who is in the least Degree conversant in the Holy Writings. Whether you have comply'd with this Duty or not will best appear to you, by considering what Union the Scriptures require from us, and by what Methods we are obliged to promote it. And

*1<sup>st</sup>.* It is agreed, that the Precepts of the Gospel require an Union of Love and Charity among its Disciples, a Tenderness of Affection, a Readiness to perform all Offices of Humanity and Benevolence towards each other. In short, to be studious of the Peace and Interests of our Brethren, and do all in our Power to promote them. But

II. A more special Union is enjoined us as Christians, that we have *one Faith, one Baptism*, Eph. iv. 5, 6. acknowledge and worship *one God and Father of all*, and *one Mediator Christ Jesus*, 1 Tim. ii. 5. Brethren, I hope that

that in these Points there is no Difference between us; that you worship the same God, trust in the same Redeemer, acknowledge the same Sacraments, and profess the same Creed or Articles that we do. But

III. There is still a farther Union required from us, a Communication with each other in the outward Offices and Ordinances of the Christian Religion. As this is the Point in which it is our Unhappiness to be divided, I beg leave to offer it more particularly to your Attention.

Now your Obligation to this Union might appear to you, considered only as the most effectual Means to cultivate that Love and Charity which the Gospel in general requires among Christians; and I may add the Peace and Happiness of the Civil Society to which we belong, for the Promotion of these is also an unquestionable Duty of our Religion. How fatal a Tendency Divisions in Religion have to alienate Mens Hearts from each other, how naturally they produce Strife and Variance, how much they put it in the

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Power of ambitious Men to divide us into secular Factions and Parties, how destructive they are of publick Peace and private Charity; needs no other Proof than our own and our Fathers Experience. And consequently being united in religious Communion is, in the same Proportion, an effectual Means to prevent and cure these Evils, and to promote that Love and Charity, that Peace and Happiness which they destroy. If then it be our Duty by all lawful Means to promote these good Ends, it is our Duty, so far as lawfully we may, to be united in religious Communion, as a Means the most conducive to them. This Argument therefore will infer our Obligation to be joined in religious Communion, *if it be possible and as far as lies in us*; and doubtless the Divine Wisdom had these happy Effects in View, when he commanded it; but the Duty obliges not only as a Means to produce these good Effects, but also in Virtue of the special Command.

In what Acts this religious Communion consists, we may collect from Scripture. Of the first Converts to the Christian Church we read that --- *they continued stedfast in the A-*  
*postles*

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*postles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in Prayer, Act. ii. 42. i. e.* They continued firm and undivided in the Belief and Profession of that Doctrine which the Apostles taught, united in one *Fellowship, Society, or Church* over which they presided, and testified this Union by communicating with them and each other in *Prayer*, and receiving together the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; that great Symbol of Christian Fellowship, by which, as the Apostle tells us, *we being many are one Bread, and one Body; for we are all Partakers of that one Bread, 1 Cor. x. 17.* What was the Duty of those first Christians, remains a Duty to all Christians unto the End of the World. All Christians are as much obliged as they were to be united in the same Fellowship or Society, under Persons succeeding to the Apostles in the Ministry and Oversight of the Church, and to communicate in Worship and other publick Ordinances of Religion. For all After-conversions made but an Accession to that first Society of Christians, which continued still one *Catholick Apostolick Church, one Body, tho' enlarged and extended over the whole Earth.*

But



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But the Ends of Worship and Government made it necessary, that this Catholick Society so extended should be subdivided into many lesser Societies or particular Churches.

Now, setting aside all Questions relating to the primary Divisions and Sub-divisions of the Catholick Church, the Subordination of the Parts, and the Laws and Terms of Catholick Union between them, as Points which do not appear to concern your Case, I presume it will not be denied,

That 'tis the Duty of all Christians to be united in Church-Fellowship; and the Nature of the thing points out to us, as the most practicable Method of complying with this Duty, that so many Christians as by the Vicinity of their Habitation may conveniently meet together in the same Assembly, should be joined in one Congregation or Church, and communicate with each other in *breaking of Bread and in Prayer, hearing the Word*. That several of these Congregations may be combined together, so as to make one larger Society or Church, appears from those Scriptures where we read of the Church of *Jerusalem, of Corinth, of Ephesus, of Antioch,*

*Per-*

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*Pergamus, Thyatira, &c.* For it is not to be conceived that the whole Multitude of Believers in those Cities could meet together in one Assembly; especially in that Age when they had no publick Temples or Places capable of receiving any great Numbers; and when they were forced to meet as it were by Stealth for Fear of the Persecutor.

Many of these Cities were very populous; and we have an account of large Conversions made in some of them, and several Pastors placed over those Conversions, which would have been unnecessary if they had made but one single Congregation. From hence then we may conclude, that there were in these Cities several Congregations, and yet they are spoken of together as *one Church*. From this primitive Pattern we derive our present Constitution of Parochial and Diocesan Churches; and by a Combination of all Diocesan Churches, within the same Region or Civil Dominion, is form'd what we call a National Church.

Now, whatever may be objected to the Largeness of some of our Dioceses, or whatever other Inconveniencies of this kind may appear to you in our Constitution, I think

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my self at present concern'd only to shew, that such Affociations or Combinations of Churches are lawful. Suppose then that the first Churches in any City and adjacent Parts were distinct Congregations, separate and wholly independent on each other; the Wit of Man cannot devise a more effectual Means to preserve Amity and Concord between Congregations, which must have a frequent Intercourse with each other, than for them to agree together in one common Affociation and Confederacy: and so far as they thus agree together and are confederated, they become one Society. So that if no Example of Scripture had justified such Affociations of Churches, the Nature of the thing, and the Obligation of those general Duties of Union and Concord among Christian Churches, had render'd them lawful, as the most effectual Means to these Ends: and whatever lawful Terms of Union or Confederacy such Congegations had agreed in, every Member of each had been bound to observe.

But besides this Argument from the Reason of the thing, we have, as I observed, the Example and Authority of primitive Institu-

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tion: and since the particular Boundaries of such Associations are not any where defined and limited in Scripture, it must be left to the Discretion of the Churches concerned to assign them such Limits, as may best promote those great Ends of Union and Concord, so far as external Circumstances will permit. And doubtless an Association of all Churches within the same civil Dominion has a most apparent Tendency to promote those good Ends; and was therefore practised, so far as the Circumstances of the Church would admit, before any civil State became Christian, and as soon as the Nations of the World received Christianity, the Boundaries of their civil Districts were professedly made the Rule of such ecclesiastical Associations, as the most effectual Provision for both Christian and Civil Peace and Order. Such national Combinations of Churches must therefore appear so far necessary, as the most effectual Means for obtaining an End, confessed to be necessary, are themselves necessary: But 'tis sufficient to my present Purpose if they are lawful: and such they must be acknowledged, unless it can be shewn either that they

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are in *general* forbidden by some Law of God, or, in *particular*, that the Association we are required to join in, exacts from us some Conditions of Union which cannot consist with our Obedience to God. In general, I presume, you will not deny the Lawfulness of them, or refuse to speak of the Church of *Scotland* or the Church of *Geneva* as one Church, tho' consisting of many united Congregations. And if to our particular Constitution any unlawful Terms of Union are objected, whenever they are produced they will require a distinct Consideration. But supposed Inconveniences cannot be a good Reason against Submission to it, because that cannot be a good Reason against any one Constitution, which, if allowed, would be a good Reason against all. Now there never was, nor ever will be, any such Association enter'd into, or any Constitution form'd upon it, wholly free from Objections of this Kind. It can never be expected, that Men should universally agree in Judgment, concerning the Conveniences or Inconveniences, of some parts at least, in any publick Constitution : and common Reason directs, that in things of prudential

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Consideration, such as these are, the minor Part in every Society should be concluded by the Judgment of the major, or, which is all one, by that Authority which is intrusted to act for the whole, in whatever Hands that Authority is placed. A Submission in Questions of this kind the Nature of the thing implies in the Stipulations of every Member of every Society, *as such*; and it is as necessary to the Subsistence of the Church of *Geneva*, as a Society, as to the Subsistence of the Church of *England*.

And since no Society great or small can subsist, or even be conceiv'd, without a Distinction of some Persons from others by Order and Office, and must be composed of Governors and Governed; all Churches or Combinations of Churches being confessedly Societies, this Distinction must be admitted in them. Accordingly we read that *St. Paul and Barnabas ordained Elders in every City*, Acts xiv. 23. where they had made Conversions, and committed to them the *Oversight of the Flock*. Tit. i. 5. *Titus* is instructed to do the same in *Crete*, and *Timothy* in *Ephesus*, 1 Tim. v. 22. compared with iii. 2.

Of

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Of these Superiors in the Church some are said to *rule well*, and to be therefore *worthy of double Honour*, 1 Tim. v. 17. and to these Rulers in general their Inferiors are commanded to *submit themselves*, and be *obedient*, as to Persons *who watched for their Souls*, and must *give an account to God*, Heb. xiii. 17. Indeed without a Submission to their Authority within its proper Limits, their Appointment would be to no manner of Purpose, nor in the least degree promote that Order and Union it was intended to preserve.

Under what Distinction of Orders, or in what special Officers, or in what Subordination of one to another this Authority should be placed, and the Administrations of it adjusted, in any Churches or Associations of Churches, whether the supreme Direction should be left to all Presbyters in common, or whether to them subordinately, and under the Superintendence and Oversight of one Person within certain Districts, I think you not concerned to enquire, any farther than whether one or the other Form of Polity be unlawful. For my own part, I am verily persuaded that the Plea of original Institution

stitution is decisive for Episcopacy; but I will suppose, for the present, this Plea to be equal on both sides, and contend only that the Episcopal Form is *lawful*. And I hope a Form of Polity under which all Christian Churches throughout the World subsisted for almost 1500 Years, will not be condemned as in its self *unlawful*. As to our own Episcopacy, it has had the Approbation of all foreign Churches of the Reformation, and even of *Geneva* it self. If then the Episcopal Form be acknowledged *lawful*, all that can remain in Question about it is, whether it be more *convenient* or *inconvenient* than the other. But Questions of this kind (as I have observed) must in the Nature of the thing be decided by publick Resolutions. If therefore the major part of the Churches associating resolve on Episcopacy as the most convenient Form, the minor and dissentient part must submit to it, or else the Association is at an End; neither is it possible for any Union to be formed, either upon the Scheme of Episcopacy or Presbytery, without admitting these Principles. I observe only farther, that, by such Agreement of the whole, not only each Church,

but



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but every Member of each Church so associated, is concluded; and whoever is afterwards admitted into any of these Churches, is admitted under the Terms of such Association, and, as a Member of that Church, is obliged to conform to them in the Duties of his Station.

From what has been said we may pretty well collect the Sum of that religious and social Union, that *Communion of Saints* which the Precepts of the Gospel enjoin, and the Constitution of every Christian Church, as a Society, requires between the Members of it.

1. All Combinations of Churches, whether Diocesan or National, are bound as Members of the same Body to observe some common Laws of Christian Confederacy; to profess the same Rule of Faith, acknowledge each other's Administrations, be disposed mutually to communicate in Worship, and, in order to that, agree in the same general Terms of Communion, and submit to such Rules of Peace and Order as are established by the joint Consent and Authority of the whole Body.

2. This Communion of Saints implies, that all the Members of each particular Church or Congregation should therein communicate with each other in Worship, and other Ordinances

dinances of Christian Religion; under the Rules agreed on by the general Association in which they are incorporated; and, according to their Stations, pay all due Submission to the Authority of those who, in the established Subordinations of Power, preside over it: for without this it is impossible that any social Union should be preserved.

Now, if such Union as has been described, be, to Christians in such Circumstances, a Duty founded on plain Precepts of the Gospel, a Breach of this Union, where it can be preserved, must be a Sin: which Sin has obtained the Name of *Schism*, or *Division*. If two or more particular Churches set up different and opposite Rules of Faith, refuse to communicate with each other in Worship, in *breaking of Bread* and in *Prayer*, and renounce each other's Administrations, there is doubtless a Schism; a Breach of Christian Union, between them. And this Breach is much aggravated, if these Churches were under the Tie of a mutual Contract and Association to preserve Communion with each other in these Instances. In like manner if any Members of a particular Church renounce

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its Worship and Assemblies, refuse to communicate with it in the Ordinances of Christian Religion, withdraw all Obedience from the Guides and Pastors of it, and set up distinct Assemblies in Opposition to it, there is evidently a Schism between the Members of that Church; a Breach of that spiritual Union and *Bond of Peace* which Christian Religion prescribes. The only Question is, who in these Cases are the Schismaticks, or on whom the Guilt of such Separation lies.

Now it is acknowledg'd, that to every particular Church and to every single Christian the Laws of Christ are of prior and greater Obligation than any other social Laws of outward Union and Concord. For the fundamental Principle upon which Christians are united in these Societies is, that they may jointly observe the Laws of Christ. This is the primary Condition and Stipulation of their Union; and all the Obedience they owe to the Rules, and all the Submission they promise to the Authority of such Society, is under the Reserve of this Condition---That it consists with Obedience to Christ. If therefore any Church or Churches shall depart  
from,

from, or corrupt the common Faith, mix Idolatry or Superstition in their Worship, and require an Approbation and Concurrence in these Corruptions as Terms of Communion, they have broken the original Stipulation; and 'tis not only lawful for other Churches, but their Duty to separate from them, and renounce their Communion. And in this Case, the Churches which thus corrupt themselves, and render it unlawful for others to communicate with them, are guilty of the Schism, and not those which depart from them. And for the same Reasons, every single Member of such a corrupt Church is justify'd in withdrawing himself from its Society and Communion; neither will he be guilty of Schism in so doing, but the Church which requires those unlawful Terms of Communion will be guilty of the Schism.

Nay I will acknowledge to you farther, that tho' the Terms of Communion with any Church be in themselves lawful, yet if any Person is perswaded in his Mind that they are unlawful, he cannot, while such Persuasion continues, comply with them without Sin; for to him who thinks them Sin, to

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him they are Sin ; and he who can do what he is persuaded is a Sin, his Will is equally criminal, and he would as certainly have done it if it had been really one. But I must here observe to him who acts under such a mistaken Persuasion, that his Excuse before God will depend on the Care and Diligence he has used in informing himself. If he has taken up this Persuasion from Passion and Prejudice, hastily and without due Examination, and neglected the proper Means of his Information, his Error it self will be one Sin, and his Separation in consequence of it another ; for God will not allow us to plead one Sin in excuse of another.

And now, Brethren, let me intreat you to apply to your own Case what has been suggested. There is manifestly **between us** a Breach of that **Communion of Saints**, that Union and spiritual Society which the Gospel requires among Christians. The Congregations to which you are join'd, and the National, Diocesan, and Parish Church from which you separate, hold no Communion, but stand in Opposition to each other. The Teachers whom you have chosen, and to whose

whose Guidance you have committed yourselves, own no Relation to our Society, but renounce all Subjection to its Rules, Orders, and Authority. In the Language of the primitive Church, here is Altar set up against Altar, Worship against Worship, Pastor against Pastor. If ever there was a Schism in any Age or Part of the Christian Church, here is one between us. And if the Apostle so severely reprov'd the *Contentions* arisen in the Church of *Corinth*, while one said *I am of Paul*, another *I am of Apollos*, another *I am of Cephas*, 1 Cor. i. 12. and declares them to be *Carnal*, 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4. tho' the Persons, by a Preference of whose Ministry they distinguish'd themselves, were in perfect Communion with each other, and joint Ministers of the same Church; how much more carnal must be our *Contentions*, who are listed under Teachers who hold no Communion with each other, but profess themselves Members of opposite Societies? If he blames *Divisions* among them, tho' they were such as did not rise to an actual Separation, but notwithstanding them they still *came together in the Church*, 1 Cor. xi. 18. how much more

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blameable are our *Divisions* who *forsake the Assembling ourselves together*, Heb. x. 25. and renounce each other's Congregations. Here is doubtless a sinful Separation between us; and on whom the Guilt of it lies, it concerns us on both Sides to inquire.

That this Separation has been made by your Departure from us, and not by our Departure from you, is a Matter of Fact which cannot be denied. For tho' perhaps you may (at least some of you) plead---That you were never Members of our Church, but bred up from your Childhood in Congregations opposite to it, yet, if the Separation to which you adhere was first made by a Departure of your Predecessors from us; it is evident that you continue the Separation upon the same Foot on which it was first made; and if they sinned in separating themselves from our Church, you must also be *Partakers of their Sin* in continuing and adhering to that Separation. You must therefore in this Question be consider'd as the Persons departing; and it lies upon you, to shew that the Reasons of your Departure are such as will justify it.

Now,

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Now, if our Church requires from you, as a Condition of Communion, any thing unlawful, if you cannot join in our Worship and Offices, without doing something which the Laws of Christ have forbidden, then are we the Schismatics, and you are justify'd in departing from us. But on the contrary, if our Church requires nothing from you, as a Condition of her Communion, which is unlawful, if you may join in our Worship and Offices, and observe all Rules prescribed to you in your Station, without doing any thing which the Laws of Christ have forbidden, then are we guiltless, and the Sin of this Separation must lie upon you. This is the proper Rule by which we must guide our selves in this Enquiry. When God and Man command different Things, there is no Question but *God is to be obeyed rather than Man*, Act. iv. 19. But when our lawful and proper Superiors injoin nothing that any Law of God has forbidden, then it is evident that we may obey Man, without disobeying God: And since God has in general commanded us, to *obey and submit our selves, to those who rule over us, and watch for our Souls*, Heb. xiii.



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17. he who, within the proper Limits of their Authority, pays this Submission to them, performs a Christian Duty, and in obeying Men obeys God.

It is indeed imply'd in my former Concession, that if any Person among you is persuaded in his Mind, that the Terms of Communion which our Church requires from him, are sinful, he cannot, while that Persuasion continues, innocently act against it: But then you must remember, how much it concerns you carefully to examine the Grounds of this Persuasion, to apply your selves to all reasonable Means of Instruction, and especially to those to whom the Ministry of the Word is committed, whose Office was instituted for this very End, that you *should no more be carried to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Sleight of Men, and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, but be edify'd in Truth and Love, Eph. iv. 14, 15.* In this Inquiry you must divest your selves of all Passions and Prejudice, and hear with equal Attention what may be said on each side of the Question before you. If, upon the Result of such Inquiry, your Persuasion continues, you will then

then be excused in acting according to it; but if without such Examination you fall into Error, your Error will be sinful, and by no means excuse what you shall act in Consequence of it.

No Church, I believe, in the Christian World requires fewer Terms of Communion, from Persons in your Station, than the Church of *England*. An explicit Approbation of our Rules and Articles, and the greatest Part of our social Constitution, is indeed required from those who are admitted into the Offices of our Ministry; and to all who intend that holy Calling among us, the attentive Consideration of those things they are required to subscribe to is of Concern: but the Scruples that may withhold their Subscription, cannot in the least affect you, from whom no such Subscription is demanded. These Subscriptions are not Terms of Communion with our Church, but only Terms of being admitted into its Offices: And if nothing unlawful be imposed on you in your Station, you have no Occasion to look farther, or concern yourselves with what is required from another in his Station, for the Duties of which you are

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not accountable. A Communication in our publick Worship and Administration of Sacraments is all that is insisted on, from Persons in your Station, as the ordinary standing Terms of Communion with us; and therefore all the Scruples that can withhold you from such Communion, must relate to these Offices. What particular Objections are in View to each of you, I know not; I presume they are various, according to the different Prejudices and Apprehensions of Men: But whatever they are, let me intreat you in the *Bowels of Christ Jesus*, and as you tender your own Salvation, faithfully to examine the Grounds of them; to lay aside all Prepossessions, to put on a true Christian Meekness, not being too wise in your own Conceits, nor leaning too much to your own Understanding, but taking with you all proper Assistances, and advising with those from whom you may reasonably expect Light and Direction. I, for my Part, shall, according to mine Office, be ready to assist you, and, according to my Abilities, to guide you to Truth in this Inquiry. The Things in Consideration are of equal Concern to you and me. And tho'

tho' I am verily persuaded that no unlawful Condition of Communion is required by our Church, either from you in your Station, or from me in mine, yet, if I should be otherwise convinced, I trust that, thro' the Grace of God strengthening me, no worldly Regards should prevail on me to comply with it.

You will not expect, that in this Address I should enter into all the Particulars objected to our Church by those who dissent from us. When you reflect on the great Importance of being well assured in the Principles and Motives of your Separation, I hope you will each of you give me more private Opportunities of debating Particulars with you; but whatever Assistance you make choice of, this I beg leave to inculcate to you, that you confine your Inquiry to the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of the Thing you scruple; for in this Inquiry only is your *Conscience* concern'd. If you confess the Things which offend you to be in their Nature indifferent, that is, neither commanded nor forbidden by God, they cannot be a just Reason in *Conscience* of your Departure from us. For consider, I pray you, what you mean, when you say you cannot in *Con-*

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*Science* join with us: Is it not, that by so joining you should offend God? Nothing can be a Rule of *Conscience* but some Law of God; if then you acknowledge the Things you are required to comply with, not to be forbidden by God, it is evident that you cannot offend God by complying with them; for where there is no Law, there is no Transgression, and consequently you cannot plead *Conscience*, as restraining your Compliance in these Cases.

If you say, you do not condemn our Worship, or the Ceremonies prescrib'd in it, as unlawful, but you like another way of Worship better; you think our Ceremonies improper, inexpedient, &c. and that these are sufficient Reasons for your Departure from us; let me observe to you,

1<sup>st</sup>, That these are at most but Considerations of *Prudence*, perhaps only of *Humour*, but certainly not of *Conscience*.

2<sup>dly</sup>, Let me intreat you to consider, that all Union of Men in publick Worship is impossible, unless Things of mere prudential Consideration are submitted to some publick Determination. The Nature of the Thing, and an Apostolical Precept require that *Decency*  
and

*and Order* 1 Cor. xiv. 40. should be preserv'd in publick Worship; but without the Observation of some common Rules these Ends cannot be provided for in any Assembly: and since the special Rules by which these Ends should be provided for, are not, and perhaps could not be, prescribed in Scripture for all Ages, it follows, that the special Determination of them must be left a Matter of Prudence and Discretion. Now concerning Matters of Prudence and Discretion Men ever did, and ever will, differ in Opinion. That will appear indecent and improper to one Man, which to another appears decent and proper. What possible way then remains for a Society of Men to be united in the Observation of any Rules providing for these Ends, but the Submission of the minor Part to the Judgment of the major, or, which in the Event will prove just the same Thing, leaving the Determination to some common Authority? The Force of this Argument may perhaps appear more plainly to you, when apply'd in some proper Instances. The times of assembling, the Order in which Prayers, Thanksgivings, Instructions, &c. should succeed

ceed one another, and the outward bodily Behaviour of the Persons assembled, both Minister and People, are Circumstances which *Order* and *Decency* require to be under some Regulation, because 'tis evident, that in these Circumstances, Disorder, Indecency, and Confusion may happen. And I presume your own Meetings are not without some regular Usages in these Things. How then did you come to an Agreement in them? Did you all exactly concur in Judgment concerning them? This, if it were so, must be acknowledged pure Accident. But suppose it should happen otherwise, as it very well may do in Matters of mere prudential Consideration, and that some few should dissent from the rest, and dislike your Rules or Usages in any of these Particulars; would you allow this a good Reason for them to divide themselves from you, and set up another Meeting in Opposition to yours? I presume you would not. Consider then whether you do not the same Thing with regard to us, if, upon a Dislike to some prudential Rules for outward Behaviour in our Worship, you separate your selves from us. If you leave it to the Discretion of  
your

your Teacher (as most probably you do) to determine in these Things for himself and you, to observe what Order he pleases in Prayers, Instructions, &c. and to use what Gestures he thinks fit in his several Administrations; if you acquiesce in his Choice for himself, and submit your own Behaviour to his Advice or Direction; what more than this is required from you by the Church from which you separate? What else, but to acquiesce in the Minister's using such Order and Gestures in the several Parts of Worship as he approves, and submitting your own Behaviour to the Direction of your Pastors?

The Matter indeed of the Prayers we join in is a Subject of much higher Consideration than the former. We are first and chiefly concern'd to be satisfied that 'tis lawful. But in the present Argument I suppose it acknowledg'd, that our Liturgy contains in it no Matter unlawful. But there are some Things in it which you disapprove, which you think might be left out, or alter'd for the better. I confess indeed that the Matter of our publick Prayers to God ought not only to be lawful, but also decent and proper; but to whom must

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it be left to provide for these Circumstances? To consult every single Person who is to use or join in them is impracticable; to adjust a Liturgy to every one's Fancy, to accommodate it to all the various inconsistent Objections that either are, or hereafter may be, made to any Part of it, is impossible: The only practicable Expedient is, to trust the Composure to some Persons of whose Wisdom, Piety and Abilities we may reasonably presume; and I hope our ecclesiastical Superiors will not, even on these Accounts, be an improper Choice. It is not indeed to be imagin'd, that the Composition which, after the most deliberate Revisals, they shall agree on, will be free from all Objections; that no one will dislike any Part of it, or fancy could alter it for the better: But I see no other possible Way, by which a publick Liturgy can be framed, and received into common Use.

In the Way of Worship which you choose, the Propriety of the Matter, and the Decency of the Expression in the Prayers you join in, are left wholly to the Discretion of your Minister. In whatever Prayers he offers, you are bound implicitly to follow him. I would

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not reflect on the Parts and Abilities of your Teachers; much less impute to all the offensive Indecencies which some may have been guilty of: But I beg you to consider, whether any one among them for himself, or whether you, in his Behalf, can with Modesty presume, that a single Person's hasty (and as it is pretended) *extempore* Composure can be more free from reasonable Exceptions, than a Liturgy which was the Result of the most deliberate Consultation of so many grave, learned and pious Men, as were the Compilers of that received by our Church. Men whose venerable Names stand recorded in our Histories, as the chief Authors and Glory of our Reformation: and who were all of them either Martyrs or Confessors for it. Were the Prayers used in any one of your Meetings, even within the Compass of one Month, submitted to Examination, I doubt not, but more reasonable Objections might be made to the Matter or Composure of them, than the peevish Scrutiny of so many Ages has been able to suggest against our Liturgy. But to form a true Judgment in this Question, whether, the Way of Worship chosen by those of

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the Separation be, upon the whole, preferable to our Liturgy, as a publick Provision for a Society, either for Matter or Composure, the Comparison ought to be extended much farther, and take in all the Performances of this Kind in all your Meetings.

If your Objection against communicating with us in this Liturgy be only that it is a Form; consider, that this Objection divides you from the foreign Churches of the Reformation as well as from us; who have all of them, even *Geneva* it self, a publick Liturgy. And permit me to observe, that you your selves are as much confined to a Form in your Prayers as we are, tho' not always to the same Form; for you are confined to pray in the Words of your Minister and no other. This, whatever it may be to him, is as much a Form to you, as ours is to us; neither does it alter the Case, as to you, whether he delivers himself *Extempore*, or previously composes his Prayers, or repeats, or even reads them out of a Book. But this great Difference there is between our Forms and his, that whereas 'tis in your Power to consider ours before-hand, acquaint yourselves  
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with the Meaning, and be satisfy'd in the Lawfulness of every Petition: In his you are obliged immediately to join without any previous Examination. And tho' nothing unlawful or improper should be deliver'd by him, of which you cannot but confess there may be sometimes Danger, yet this at least must often happen, that, thro' the Obscurity of the Expression, and the quick Succession of one Sentence to another; many Things must, upon so short a Consideration as is allow'd, remain unintelligible, and so you must say *Amen* to what you do not understand. It were easy for me to enlarge on this Argument; but the comparative Expediency or Inexpediency, the Advantages or Disadvantages of stated Forms, or only general Directories for publick Worship, must, as all other Questions of prudential Consideration, be submitted to publick Decisions; because this is the only Way by which we can be united upon either Scheme. And consequently, he who refuses to submit to such Decision, must be guilty of Sedition, and opposing Authority within the proper Limits of Power belonging to it.

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I presume you would be glad, that such Way of Worship, and such Scheme of Church-fellowship as you most approve, should be generally received and establish'd. This has been the profest Desire of all Persons of any Character among your Teachers from the Beginning of the Separation. And the unhappy Covenant which your Predecessors enter'd into, in its first Article, declares this to be its Intention.---*To bring the Churches of God in the Three Kingdoms to the nearest Conjunction and Uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church-Government, and Directory for Worship, and Catechising: that they and their Posterity after them might as Brethren live in Faith and Love.*----In which Profession it is very truly supposed that 'tis the Duty of all Christians to live together as Brethren in Faith and Love: And that the most effectual Means to this End is a Conjunction and Uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith, &c. But such a Conjunction and Uniformity is impossible, either upon your Scheme or ours, without such a Submission of some to the Judgment of others as we contend for. In all Cases of this Nature the Bounds of private  
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*Address'd to the Dissenters.* 37

Consideration must be the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of what is establish'd. I cannot indeed help judging that to be inexpedient, which to me appears to be so: And as I acknowledge for my self, so I presume I may for the greater part of my Brethren, that we judge our present Constitution might in many Respects be alter'd for the better: some of us imagine we see Defects in one Part, and some in another; But we all know, that in Questions of Expediency it is our bounden Duty, and what the Nature of all Society requires, that we should submit our several private Judgments to the Judgment of publick Authority: and that no Uniformity of Men or Churches in Confession of Faith, Form of Government, or Worship can be establish'd, and consequently no brotherly Union in Faith and Love be preserv'd, upon any Scheme imaginable, without admitting these Principles.

Upon the whole I beseech you, to consider with a serious and impartial Attention, what has been offer'd to you. Remember at the same time how earnestly our Blessed Lord prayed to his Father, *that all who should believe on him might be one*, Joh. xvii. 20, 21.

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How passionately his Apostle exhorts the Disciples of the Gospel, *by the Name of our Lord Jesus, that they all speak the same Things, that there be no Divisions among them; that they be perfectly join'd together in the same Mind, and the same Judgment,* 1 Cor. i. 10. And in another Place—*If there be any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies, fulfil ye my Joy, be ye like-minded, having the same Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind. Let nothing be done thro' Strife or Vain-glory, but in Lowliness of Mind, let each esteem other better than themselves,* Philip. ii. 1, 2, 3. And a little after—*Do all Things without Murmuring or Disputing,* Philip. ii. 14. The only possible Way of complying with these Intreaties and Commands has, I am persuaded, been suggested to you in the preceding Reflections, the Sum of which is this :

Where the Lawfulness or Unlawfulness of an Action is in Question, the Law of God in the Books of Holy Scripture is doubtless the Rule and Measure of every Christian Duty, so far as the Direction of that Law reaches: And tho', in inquiring into the Sence  
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of that Law we are bound to use all proper Methods of Information, and among these, as one of the most proper, to consult and advise with Persons of whose superior Knowledge we may reasonably presume, and especially those *who are over us in the Lord*, and to defer as much to their Authority, as 'tis fit and reasonable for us to do in an Inquiry into the Meaning of any other ancient Book; yet, if in the Result of such Application we cannot be satisfy'd but that the Action required from us is forbidden by God's Law, we cannot in Compliance with any Authority perform it. If we thus *please Men*, we cannot also be the *Servants of Christ*, Gal. i. 10. But where the Question is only concerning Expediency or Inexpediency, &c. there the Command of the Apostle must take place---*That we speak the same Things, be of one accord, join'd together in the same Mind, &c.* But how must this be brought to pass? By all exactly concurring in Judgment? No surely; this in prudential Consideration is not to be expected. But this is his Direction---To lay aside all *Strife and Vain-glory, in Lowliness of Mind, each esteeming other better than themselves*; and, as  
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he elsewhere requires, *submitting one to another*. How then shall this be practicable? by every one giving up his Opinion to another? This will be but changing Sides, and the Division will remain as before. Shall we then allow every one to practise according to his own Judgment? But where then will be the Union, the *Accord*, the *perfect joining together*, the *speaking the same things* which the Apostle prescribes? Suppose, in the Instance above consider'd, that one Party be for stated Forms in publick Worship, the other against them; and each be allowed to practise according to their different Opinions: must not this Practice necessarily divide them from each other in publick Worship? When we have tried and consider'd all Schemes imaginable of being thus united as the Apostle commands, this only will be found practicable in Society, that in all Questions of Expediency the one Part submit to the Judgment of the other; the lesser to the greater, or which, as I observ'd, will be the same Thing in Result, the whole submit to the Judgment of publick Authority: And consequently this the Apostle must be understood to command.

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For if such Submission be in the Nature of the Thing necessary to such Union as he enjoins, when he enjoins the Union, he must injoin the Submission; and if one be a Duty, the other must be so too.

Between different Churches indeed different Rules and Usages in Matters of Expediency may very well consist with a brotherly Correspondence; tho' the greater their Uniformity is in these Things, the more perfectly will Concord and Amity be preserved between them: But between the Members of the same Church, unless Rules of this kind be submitted by the Inferiors to the Wisdom of the Superiors, all social Union is impracticable.

Brethren, I have offer'd you my Judgment upon your Separation from us, and, I hope, not without some Reasons in Support of it. It would be Matter of the greatest Joy to me, if but one single Person should be hereby recall'd to Unity of Christ's Flock; *but whether you will bear, or whether you will forbear*, Ezek. ii. 5. I shall reflect with Satisfaction, that I have discharged my Conscience towards you. And I trust, that, when I shall appear before the great Shepherd, no Article will lie against me on

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your account. In the mean time I shall not cease to pray for you, that God would enlighten your Minds, take from you all Ignorance, Prejudice, and Hardness of Heart, and dispose you, with a true Christian Humility, to *mind the things which belong to your Peace.*

*The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

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