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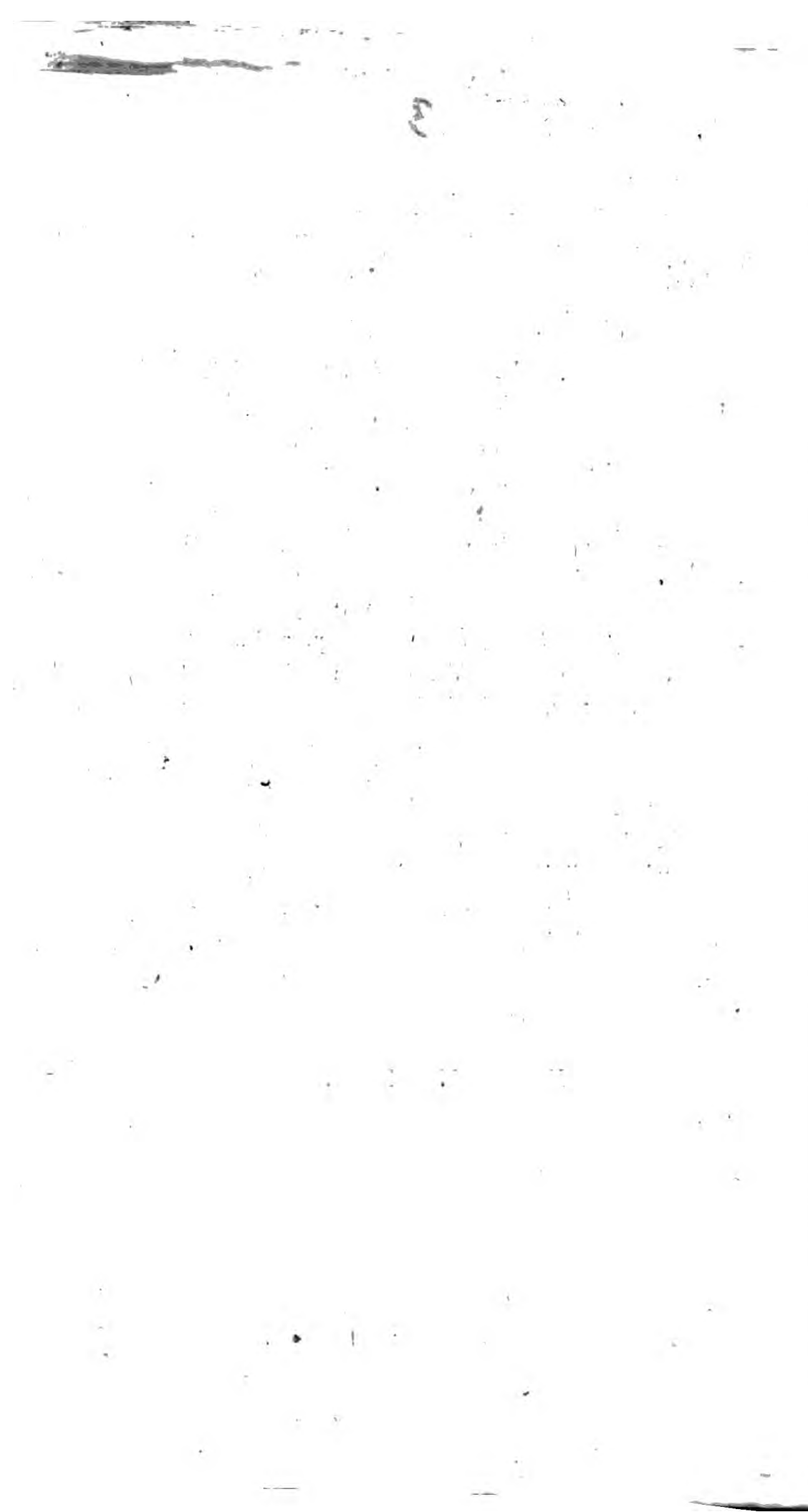
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*J.D.*

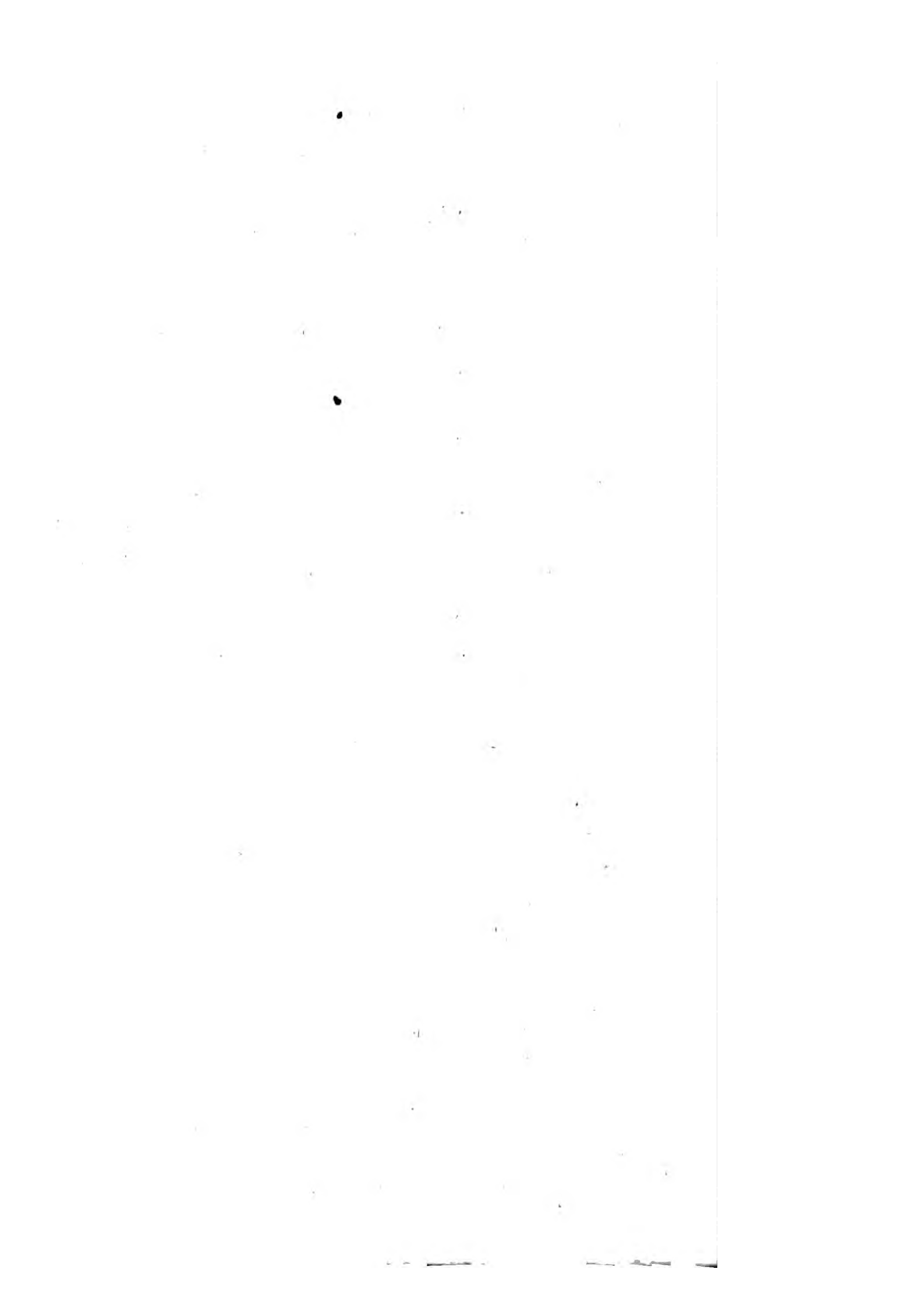
*Mar. 30. 1790.*

A

**L E T T E R, &c.**

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[PRICE SIXPENCE.]



A  
L E T T E R

TO THE

A U T H O R O F

“OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONDUCT OF  
THE PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.”



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FINGERE QUI NON VISA POTEST

— HIC NIGER EST. HOR.

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B U R Y :

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. RACKHAM ;

SOLD ALSO BY ALL THE BOOKSELLERS IN SUFFOLK.

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1790.



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A

L E T T E R, &c.

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S I R,

W A S I inclined to adopt your performance, as a pattern in any respect worthy of imitation, I should not prefix to my own a fulsome panegyric upon the candour or virtues of any man. The character and disposition of the Bishop of Lincoln are so generally attested, as to need no encomium: a sense of this seems to have restrained you from disgracing your first page with a scurrilous exordium, lest his lordship, or any other reader of the same liberal turn, might be induced, on the first inspection, to throw aside your work, and to decline any further

B

perusal.

perusal. In the first few lines, therefore, you artfully affect to be an advocate for the natural rights of mankind; and stamp with the odious appellation of bigotry and despotism, that power, which would violate those rights, or exercise dominion over the consciences of men. You very justly attribute the fair fruit of liberality and forbearance, to the general diffusion of knowledge; but you have scarce ventured upon the taste of this delicious fruit, before you nauseate the flavour, and indignantly reject it. Your first position, that every society has a right to fix the terms of admission into it, is a point which I believe none will dispute: but your second, that a particular mode of faith, or a concurrence in a particular religious rite, is the strongest bond of civil union, may, I conceive, until better proofs of its truth be produced than what you or any one else have hitherto advanced, be repeatedly and with propriety denied.

The question has long since been agitated by men of abilities so far superior to mine,  
and,



and, I presume, Sir, without any imputation of defect, to yours also, that as it is not of recent date, you will pardon the want of novelty in my arguments against it. Your letter, Sir, has been applauded by many, for elegance of language, and strength of reasoning: to the former, I readily accede; but against the latter, I as readily protest. It is no uncommon fault, with persons enamoured of the style, and well turned periods, of a literary performance, to pay more attention to such delicate features, than to the muscular strength of reason. Where the sentiments of the reader are in unison with those of the writer, real deformities have been varnished into beauties, and mere declamation considered as argument. Readers of another class, with minds open to conviction, but not sufficiently befriended by a liberal education, from an inability to start objections themselves, and for want of having them placed in a collateral line of observation, have not unfrequently mistaken a bold assertion for a substantial truth.

To readers of the latter description, and to yourself, Sir, I offer my reasons, against the application of a religious rite (the Lord's Supper), to a civil purpose; and to shew its inefficacy, as a bond for civil union. The rite, as instituted by our Lord himself, contains but one short reason for the observation of it. *Do it in remembrance of me.* It can scarcely be supposed, that the bare remembrance of his person or complexion, was the whole that was implied in this injunction: many and inestimable benefits, would certainly devolve, not only on his then Disciples, but on all succeeding christians, from the repeated remembrance of his life, his death, and resurrection. A life devoted to acts of mercy and benevolence, would necessarily engage the attention of his followers, and urge them to imitate so illustrious an example: the noble sacrifice he made to the cause of virtue and religion, would evince the sincerity of his professions; attach them immoveably to his interest; and fortify their minds under the pressing trials, which awaited their fidelity.

His

His resurrection would prove the divinity of his mission, afford them the strongest assurance of their own, open a prospect of immortality, and elevate their hopes of attaining the rewards of his spiritual kingdom. I do not presume to say, that I have enumerated all and every benefit that may be derived from the due observation of this religious rite: be they ever so numerous, or ever so great, they must equally partake of the same nature. Enough, I trust, has been said, to point out their connection with a kingdom which is not of this world. The ends to which they operate are spiritual blessings, not temporal emoluments. To the application, therefore, of this religious rite to any temporal or civil purpose I can affix no other name than profanation.

The inefficacy of such a test, as a bond of civil union, if by civil union is meant a general concurrence in the interest and welfare of the state; will evidently appear, if no necessary connection can be made out, between  
the

the means and the end. Had Christ to the words, *Do this in remembrance of me*; subjoined words to the following effect: ‘ My  
 ‘ disciples, though the rite I have now instituted for you, can be of no other use, either  
 ‘ to you, or the converts you shall make to my religion, with the present generation;  
 ‘ than, that my example will be ever present to your eyes, and my admonition to your  
 ‘ ears; my patience under sufferings, fortify your minds in similar situations, and give  
 ‘ you an interest in the rewards of a future life. Yet when it shall please the rulers of  
 ‘ this world, who are now mine, and will be your implacable enemies, to take my religion under their protection. It shall then  
 ‘ become a standing test of friendship to their government; and a legal and satisfactory qualification for civil offices.’—Under such a declaration, though neither you, Sir, nor I, might be able to trace the influence, and mode of operation, on the human mind; I imagine no Christian would be hardy enough to dispute its authority, or to vote for its repeal;  
 yet,

yet, without the least shadow of such an authority, or the least possible connection between the different government of two different kingdoms, do we admit this sacred rite, as a certain proof of the religion of an atheist, the integrity of a statesman, the loyalty of a Jacobite, the bravery of a soldier, and the honesty of an exciseman. That the ruling passion of mankind for superiority and dominion, has, for its constant attendant, an affection to display it, is a truth too obvious to deny you: hence the ruling powers, both civil and ecclesiastical, have always taken care to render their inferiors perfectly sensible of their dependent state. The language and conduct on the side of power, has been as uniformly insolent and oppressive, as that on the other, humble and submissive: but when the iron rod has changed hands, the manners and language have as constantly been altered, with the change of situation; and the thirst for revenge and retaliation, added to the primary passion, have seldom failed to repay the principal of insolence, with double interest of oppression,

pression. Instances, indeed, may be produced amongst the civil rulers of mankind, where a monarch invested with the most unlimited and despotic power over his slaves, has used it with mildness and moderation :— but never, never, was such a power vested in the hands of ecclesiastics, without being perverted to the most flagrant abuses upon the consciences, the persons, and properties of the laity. I say never, Sir, till it has been your happy lot to discover, “ that lukewarmness, and not intolerance, is the distinguishing mark of that sect of Christians called the Church of England.” Intolerance is a word of so vague an import, that I despair of meeting the fulness of your ideas. Do you mean to oppose it to lukewarm? It will then mean, never intolerantly hot; but till these blessed days of refrigeration, which have come upon us, from your information; the ample page of history will attest, that from the earliest council, to the latest convocation, the church has been either smoking in a pestilential vapour, or blazing with a consuming fire.

As

As the spirit in your ecclesiastical thermometer, has so suddenly sunk from *blood heat*, at which, for centuries, it had stood, to the mild degree of temperate; I may fairly ask you, From what quarter of the compass this refreshing breeze has blown, to influence its descent? If from the general diffusion of knowledge, I would ask; Have Churchmen sown the seed, or reaped where they have not sown, the full and entire fruits in the fields of knowledge; or have they been satisfied with the tythe, and left the gleanings to the poor? The Dissenters. That *they* have collected a few grains of intellectual improvement, may appear from some recent advances they have made, in philosophical, and political, as well as religious truths. However laudable the attempt, or feeble the assistance, when put in competition with the strength of your reasoning, the *masterly* arguments of H—e, or the mild and gentle breathings of St. D—'s; they are as chaff which the wind scattereth, and, I trust, Sir, scattereth not in vain.

C

Any

Any other title than that of *Observations* would have better suited your performance; any other yourself than that of *an Observer*. How came you, Sir, to be so well acquainted with the private discipline in a dissenting family? as boldly to assert, “ In his family no  
 “ freedom of opinion is allowed; his ser-  
 “ vants, in whatever religious principles they  
 “ have been bred, are seduced, or forced, to  
 “ the conventicle; if he would not forego  
 “ the necessaries, he would at least relinquish  
 “ many of the comforts of life, rather than  
 “ purchase them of a Churchman,—and all  
 “ this with toleration in his mouth, and  
 “ persecution in his heart.” This, in truth, is not a mere and vain speculation, but it is a declamatory fiction: had you been able to produce (which you have not done) one, two, or ten instances of such narrow contracted principles, influencing the master of a family to such a persecuting conduct, it would have given you no authority for such general unqualified censure. In direct contradiction to your assertion,—in a dissenting family I am  
 acquainted



acquainted with, their last servants were, one a Papist, and the other a Churchman; and yet—wonderful to believe, the master neither attempted the conversion of the Papist, nor seduced or forced the Churchman to a conventicle.

Advertisements you possibly may have seen, where the preference may have been offered to a Dissenter; but are there no better reasons to be assigned for such a preference than bigotry to one sect and enmity to another? Surely there are duties, which the master of a well regulated family is bound to observe towards his servants; of these, it is no unimportant one to insist upon their attendance at some place of religious worship on the Sunday; but if the master goes to the Meeting without his servant, what assurance has he that the servant is not gone to the ale-house? There is another reason, perhaps not less productive of this preference than the former; the lower class of the Dissenters must eat, as well as Churchmen; but if the means of

maintenance are narrowed by exclusion from such petty offices under government, as would suit their abilities; they must needs have recourse to their brethren for subsistence, *they* are in duty bound to prefer them.—Persecution ever unites men.

Let our public fairs, markets, and tradesmen's shops, put a negative upon your next assertion, of their abstinence from the comforts of life, out of enmity to Churchmen. They can most assuredly do so. You should look at home, Sir, before you scatter your abuse upon your neighbour's conduct; with this caution in your eye, you would hardly have ventured upon exposing the ordinance of 1645, which is done away; when the act of uniformity, the statute of William and Mary, and the test act are still in force, and staring you in the face. I had almost overlooked the lamentable fate of the Book of Common Prayer,—kicked out of public worship and private families; I see no occasion a man has for a book he never intends to use, either in  
public

public or private; yet I have seen many elegantly bound books in the libraries of Churchmen, which I believe to be as equally useless in the possession of their owners, as the former book is to a Dissenter.

As an apologist for the Dissenters, I do observe, ' That the sentiments of the party ' are at present of a more liberal cast.' Perhaps they may be so, you say, for they are not in power. If power has such a deadly influence upon liberality; as their sincere friend, I heartily wish the permanency of their subjection. As you, Sir, are either in power, or, I presume, nearly allied to it, it may possibly serve as an apology for your intolerance. The same cause which has affected their liberality, has, I find affected their sincerity. " It is not from professions that " we must judge of the integrity or de- " signs of men : " very true; a man may be very sincere in his professions, yet almost all his actions be pernicious. " We must " mark their conduct, and see to what ob-  
 " jects

“jects it tends.” And if we are to form our opinion from the black marks you have set upon them, their conduct has been pernicious in the extreme. Projectors of the *grand rebellion*—murderers of the king—fomentors of the revolt in America—and all that’s infamous. The facts, I imagine, are transcribed from an history of your own compiling, for the use of children, who are generally pleased with dismal stories. I beg leave to extract an answer to it from an history written for the use of men.—“The Presbyterians, and body of the city,” says Bishop Burnet, “were much against it,” (meaning the trial and condemnation of Charles the First), “and were every where fasting and praying for the king’s prefer-  
“ vation\*.”

Archdeacon Echard says, “Cromwell first pulled down the Presbyterians, and then destroyed the king; and that almost all the Presbyterian ministers in London, and

\* Burnet’s History of his own Times, vol. ii. p. 31.

“ very

“ very many in the several counties, and a  
 “ few of the independents themselves, de-  
 “ clared against the design in their sermons,  
 “ in conferences, in monitory letters, peti-  
 “ tions, protestations, and public remon-  
 “ strances: they earnestly begged, that, con-  
 “ trary to so many oaths and imprecations,  
 “ contrary to public and private faith, they  
 “ would not defile their own hands, and  
 “ the kingdom, with royal blood\*.” Did  
 all these virtuous petitioners, and protesters,  
 die without issue? and are the present race of  
 Presbyterians only the spawn of Cromwell’s  
 army, or the Rump?

I cannot pass over your very curious pro-  
 position—“ He who is inimical to the church,  
 “ cannot be friendly to the state; and, since  
 “ the king is the head of the church, can-  
 “ not be friendly to the king.” If by the  
 church is meant a congregation of faithful  
 men, I do not see how any one can entertain  
 any enmity against it; but if it means church

\* Echard’s History of England, p. 654, 708.

power,

power, which I strongly suspect to be the case, from the precedence it always takes of king and state; the true proposition will stand thus—The church is the creature of the state, of which the king is first magistrate, and consequently the church is, and ought to be inferior. He, therefore, who is inimical to the superiority of the church is friendly to the state and king.

I must beg your attention to another extract, from an excellent author, in confirmation of the Presbyterians' loyalty. Rapin\*, speaking of the proceedings of that parliament which restored Charles the Second, thus enumerates them, “ 1st, They ordered  
 “ a discharge of all the imprisoned friends of  
 “ the King.—2d, They repealed the oath  
 “ for the abjuration of Charles Stuart, and  
 “ all the Royal Family.—3d, They voted  
 “ Monk to be General of the armies of the  
 “ three nations.—4th, They voted down the  
 “ old, and appointed a new council of state.

\* Rapin's History of England, vol. xiii. p. 199, 200

“ —5th, They made great changes in the  
 “ militia, and took away all commissions  
 “ from the republicans.—6th, They abro-  
 “ gated the oath, requiring to be faithful to  
 “ the established government, without a  
 “ King and House of Peers.—Lastly, They  
 “ dissolved themselves, issuing out writs for  
 “ a new parliament to meet the 25th of  
 “ April. In this free parliament, the Pres-  
 “ byterians, who were much superior in  
 “ number, did not think proper to exclude  
 “ the royalists, with whom they were in  
 “ perfect agreement for restoring the king.  
 “ This parliament was an assembly, in  
 “ which the Presbyterians had certainly a  
 “ superiority of voices; consequently a Pres-  
 “ byterian parliament restored the King to  
 “ the throne of his ancestors.” You cannot,  
 Sir, surely read those extracts, so much in  
 favour of the Presbyterian’s conduct, and so  
 very opposite to your own accounts, without  
 being sensible of your want of modesty, or  
 want of information?

An author of eminence amongst the Dissenters, did reprobate, the iniquitous principles of the American war, and even predicted its consequences; but I never heard that either he or his friends, contributed at all to the completion of his prophecy. He must have been a first-rate conjuror, to have supplied intelligence of the plans and operations of the projectors and managers of that war; when it was evident to the whole nation, that they themselves never knew what they were about, or what to do next. And exclusively of the feelings of humanity, for the loss of so much blood and treasure, on both sides, I believe most thinking men are now perfectly satisfied with the event.

One is almost led to imagine, from the vigilant and even jealous eye with which government is directed to observe the new academical institution; that it was formed upon the same plan with the Royal Academy, upon the Parade; where grown gentlemen are taught to prime and load to beat  
of



of drum ; instead of being conducted by men of the first-rate abilities, in every branch of science ; and exercised in all manly and Christian virtues : but it may be politically wrong, in the eye of power, to elevate and enlighten the minds of those, who are doomed to subjection : despotism thrives upon ignorance ; and is checked by information ; and perhaps their growing liberality may one day confound your full blown arrogance.

If Dr. Priestley really intended with literal gunpowder to blow up St. Paul's and the Parliament House ; I think, with you, that it was very injudicious and premature, and not at all consonant to his well known sagacity and acuteness, to give notice of his plot, before the explosion had announced it to the world. But I should imagine the Church of England will hardly thank you for the compliment, in affixing the term *fabric of error* to herself ; which I should presume the Doctor could never mean to apply to any other church, but such an one as styles herself infallible.

I have

I have not presumption sufficient to follow you in your advice to King, Lords, and Commons, respecting the proper line of conduct to be observed in this business. I shall certainly never sit in either House, you, Sir, possibly may, or do; and I should think it quite sufficient for you to give your advice at the time, or in the place you are legally asked for it.

I am, Sir,

Yours most sincerely.

