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Letter to a Friend

Relating to the present

CONVOCAATION

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Westminster.

By Richard Kipper, Dean of Peterborough

L O N D O N,

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LETTER to a FRIEND,

Relating to the

Present Convocation at *Westminster*.

SIR,

I Have fully considered what you have been pleased to offer to me in yours concerning the Convocation now met at *Westminster*, and the Alterations intended to be made therein in the present Offices, Rites and Constitutions of our Church, and all what you say I apprehend to be reducible to these three heads: 1. *That no alterations ought at all to be made in things pertaining to Religion but when there is a very great necessity for it.* 2. *That at present there is no such necessity for the alterations intended.* And, 3. *That, if there were, this is no time for it, when so many of the Fathers of our Church, and other eminent persons of the Clergy do now by their suspension stand incapacitated to act with us in this matter.*

As to the first, I readily grant what you say, That nothing is more dangerous to Religion, than frequently to make alterations in the things pertaining thereto, because an unsteadiness as to these, although in outward circumstantial onely, which are always alterable, may to many become an argument against the whole. For there being multitudes among us who are not able to distinguish between what is circumstantial and what is essential in our Worship, what is in the power of the Church to alter, and what is not, and are apt to call every alteration though in things merely indifferent,

and which the variation of times have made totally insignificant to the first end of their establishment, to be a change of the Religion it self; and therefore concluding that we have no firm bottom at all for that which they see us so often vary from, may from hence be induced to cast off all regard both for our Church and the Worship of God established therein, and become Apostates from us either to Popery or Atheism all their life after. For the prevention whereof I readily grant what you say, That such alterations ought not to be attempted but when there is an absolute necessity for them. And therefore the Church of *England* may be justified in her Proceedings hitherto, that she hath not been forward on every demand of the Dissenters to unhinge those of her Communion from her long received establishments, but hath to the utmost resisted all alterations from them, hoping by other less dangerous methods to cure the distractions and heal the divisions that are among us. But when after her utmost tryal of all other ways they have all proved ineffectual to attain the end proposed, and the Church hath still grown weaker and weaker, and those that dissent from it still stronger and stronger under all those attempts which have been made use of for the reuniting them to us, so that now we are brought to that pass, that without coming to a temper with them, and abating something on our side for the sake of peace and union with them, we cannot have that prospect as formerly of supporting the Church of God and maintaining the Honour of his Worship with success among us. I think now to make such alterations as are proposed a thing so absolutely necessary as ought not any longer to be deferr'd. And this I hope I shall be able clearly to convince you of in answer to your second head of objection, from these following reasons.

For, first, There lyes an indispenfable obligation upon us to doe the utmost we are able to remove this mischievous Schism from among us, which hath so long disturb'd the Church of Christ in this Land. How prejudicial this hath been to the Honour of God and the Salvation of Men, and how advantageous to the increase of Popery and Atheism, and the propagating also of all manner of iniquity among us, is that which by wofull experience is too well known unto you to need a description: And all this evil most certainly must lye at our doors as far as we doe not the utmost that in us lyeth to remove it, and what other way is there now left of attempting it but by coming to some terms of moderation and temper with those that dissent from us. We have already tryed all methods of persuasion to mollifie them, all force of argumentation to convince them; we have tryed also Church Censures and Penal Laws, and inflicted them too with a severity perchance beyond what we can justifie; and what have we availed our selves of all this, but onely to heighten the divisions and increase the mischief which we endeavoured to remove; and therefore what other remedy is now left us, what other means for us to have recourse to for the curing of this prevailing evil among us, but that, as far as we are able we abate of that which hath given the whole origin thereto; those excepted passages in our Liturgy, and those ceremonies in our Worship which our dissenting Brethren cannot conform with us in. And for this the late Act of Toleration hath added a very pressing necessity. For when our divisions ran so high, and our animosities against each other so far increased as that Dissenters were driven by them to take shelter from us in the Camp of our common Enemy, and join with the Papists against us to the endangering both of Church and State to utter ruin. The Parliament then thought

it time to provide for the publick Safety by reconciling those men thereto by an Act of Toleration and Indulgence, whereby they being now put upon as good a bottom of legal right and protection as we our selves, there is no other way left us of coming to a union with them but by following the same steps which the State hath gone in before us, and by condescension and abatements to reconcile those men unto us: For they are now no more in our power to force them to a conformity with us than we are in theirs, and therefore they being on equal terms with us of right and protection from the Government under which we live, treaty and mutual abatement is the onely method now whereby we can be brought to a union with each other; and why we should not abate for the sake of this which carrieth with it a promise of so great good and benefit to the Church of Christ among us, I would desire a reason from him that is able to give it. For what are those things which we differ about, that we must for ever sacrifice to them the peace both of Church and State without abating the least tittle for so great a good as that of the common union of Christians among us? are a few excepted passages in our Liturgy, and two or three ceremonies in our Worship things of so great value that we must for the sake of them still maintain those discords and divisions both in Church and State which have so long harassed both almost to utter ruine? Is it not enough that we have had already a twenty years War about them? and, is it not enough, that ever since our deliverance from that, for the sake of those trifles, we have for these thirty years last past driven up our divisions and animosities against each other to that height as that we had almost totally given up our Church to Popery and our Government to Tyranny thereby? Certainly, after all this, it's time to sit down and consider whether

ther those things are of such great value for the sake of which we bring so much mischief to this poor distressed Church and Nation, that nothing must be abated of that unreasonable rigor whereby we have hitherto maintained them. And if the consideration of things past cannot move us, I beseech you, consider a little the present posture of our affairs; we have a formidable Enemy in our neighbourhood now engaged in War against us, who thinks of nothing less than subjugating these three Kingdoms to his absolute Tyranny, and imposing Popish Idolatry and Superstition upon all the Inhabitants of them; and that which gives him the greatest advantage against us, and the greatest hopes for our destruction is, our divisions among our selves at home which enfeeble both our hearts and hands for the battel, and make us unable to resist him with that success which formerly used to attend most of our other expeditions against Enemies altogether as potent; and what remedy have we left to prevent this terrible ruin that now so formidably threatens us, but to come to as firm a union among our selves as we are able? and could but this be once happily effected, we need not fear all the power of *France* and *Rome* in the firmest union against us; but should be strong enough to resist all their efforts for our ruin; and, by the blessing of God, still continue in safety, in spite of all the endeavours of both to the contrary. And since it hath pleased God to move the King to call us together in Convocation in this conjuncture, I hope we shall not let slip this opportunity of doing the utmost we are able to unite the Nation now our affairs do so much require it for the publick safety thereof. For the expectations of all men are now upon us for this purpose, and the hopes of preserving Church and State in the great dangers under which they are now both involv'd, do in a great measure depend upon what we shall

doe for our common Peace now met together and put in a way to remove those obstacles which have so long disturbed it. Have we not already lost our reputation with the people of the Land by insisting too rigorously on those things? And now we have in a great measure again retriev'd it by our firm and successfull engagement against the Popish cause, shall we be so far infatuated as again to run the same risk? will we but now come to that temper and moderation in our establishments as may remove that bone of contention which hath so long disturbed us, and think of such abatements as may tend to the settling of Peace and Union among us, the mouths of all this people shall bless us, and we shall acquire thereby that veneration and regard among them that they shall all look on us as the onely faithfull Shepherds whose voice they are to hear, and we thereby be enabled to discharge the duties of our Ministry among them with that comfort to our selves and benefit to them as shall soon fix our Church upon a foundation never more to be shaken by any of its Enemies. But if on the contrary we still persist in our old rigor, and abate no expression in our Liturgy, nor ceremony in our Worship, for the sake of so great a good; for my part, I can expect nothing less than that we become abhorr'd of the whole Nation, as the common Enemies of its peace, and be treated accordingly in every Parish where we live among them. Were those matters in which abatements are desired of us by our dissenting Brethren things of that moment that they either carried with them the force of a divine Institution, or were of their own nature so necessary to our Worship that either the Honour of God or the Interest of man's Salvation should suffer the least prejudice by their omission, it would become us then, whatever the Consequences should be, to stick to them to the utmost, and with
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the same constancy as formerly the ancient Christians did against the *Arrians*, not yield a letter to them to end the whole controversy between us. But notwithstanding what our learned Prolocutor hath been pleased in his Latin Speech to the Convocation to suggest, this is by no means our present case. For what Article of Faith, what necessary requisite of our Worship is it in which any alterations are at all intended to be proposed in this present Convocation? if he knows of any such; he would doe well to discover them, and when they come to be offered, oppose them to the utmost. But, alas, the alterations intended, how great oppositions soever they may meet with, are so far from touching upon any thing of this nature, that I can assure him, and he himself well knows it, as being one of the Commission, where they are prepared, that they are onely in those indifferent things, which have through all ages of the Church from the beginning been ever allowed to be alterable, whensoever the good of the Church should require it. And therefore since at present (as I have shewn) not onely the good of the Church in order to the establishment of its peace among us, but also the publick interest of the State too in order to its preservation in its present exigencies do so much require that those alterations should be made, why do we so obstinately stick at those matters, whereby not onely the cause of God in the welfare of his Church, but our own also in the publick interest of the Nation, is so greatly prejudiced by us? As it is a great error in some of our dissenting Brethren to allow nothing lawfull to be made use of in our publick Worship but what they find particular warrant for in Scripture, so is it no less a mistake in us to hold any thing of this nature not prescribed there to be unalterable. For our Saviour having given us his divine Law, and therein a-

mong other Precepts, commanded us the Worship of God, the Celebration of his Sacraments, and the Government of his Church for the better influencing of every member of it to all the duties enjoined, for this very reason descended not to prescribe the particular manner, rites, and constitutions which his Church afterwards made use of in the performance of all this, because it was impossible that any unalterable rule could at all be given of those matters. For the reason of these being only decency and order in the Church of God, and to be as helps therein the better to influence the minds of men to the performance of the Divine Commands they must necessarily be of their own nature variable, according as to the different variations of times, circumstances, and the customs of men they more or less become capable of answering the end design'd, and therefore have ever been in the power of the Church to constitute, alter, and abolish them, according as the honour of God, the good of his Church and the interest of Religion might be best promoted thereby. As long therefore as these Forms of Prayer which are used in our Church, and those Rites and Constitutions which are received therein do answer the end of their first establishment in being usefull to the promoting the honour of God and the edification of his people, so long they ought with constancy always to be retained; but when either the infirmity or the wickedness of men, or any other cause hath made that alteration in the Times, and in the humours and customs of those that live in them, that these things instead of conducing any longer to that good end propos'd, do on the contrary administer only to Schism and Division in the Church, and to distraction and discord in the State, whereby the peace of both is miserably disturb'd, as is too manifestly our case; from hence there ariseth a reason altogether as strong for their alteration, as ever there was at first for
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their institution. Were they become only useleſs and no longer answered their end, this would be a ſufficient reaſon alone for an alteration in them, but when over and above they are become miſchievous too in the evils that they bring both upon Church and State, this adds an obligation, which cannot I think without guilt be reſiſted, of coming to a change in theſe matters.

And to come to the particular things controverted between us, I readily aſſent that the Croſs in Baptiſm had a very good reaſon for its firſt institution: For when in the primitive times the Heathens made it a matter of conſtant reproach to the Chriſtians, that they worſhipped a crucified God, they for this reaſon appointed the Croſs after Baptiſm to be thenceforth put as a Badge upon all whom they received into the Church, to let them know, that they ought not to be aſhamed hereof. And I doubt not but that it was of excellent uſe in thoſe times to fortifie the minds of Chriſtians with that conſtancy and reſolution as was requiſite to bear them up againſt the ſcoffs and reproaches of their Heathen Adverſaries amongſt whom they lived. But now Heatheniſm hath ſo many Ages ſince been totally extinguished in thoſe parts of the World, and we live in a State which is totally Chriſtian, ſo that the Croſs of Chriſt is no longer liable to be objected to us as a reproach by any, it cannot be denied but that this Ceremony hath now totally loſt its uſe, and although it might innocently enough be ſtill retain'd, yet may it with as much innocency alſo be totally laid aſide now the alterations of times have made it wholly uſeleſs to the end for which it was firſt deſigned. But in our preſent circumſtances, when it is become not only uſeleſs but alſo miſchievous to the cauſe of Chriſt by reaſon of the Diſſenſions and Schiſms which it occaſions in his Church, and is thereby inſtead of a badge of Union and Chriſtian conſtancy

stancy under the banner of the Captain of our Salvation, as was first intended, become an Ensign of war to make us fight against each other, and a Cross of torment thereon again to crucifie the Lord of life in his body the Church, and rent its bowels asunder by those lamentable divisions which it causeth among us; in this case I think we have an obligation upon us not to be resisted from the absolute necessity of the thing, either totally to lay this Ceremony aside, or else make such abatements concerning its use, as may allay all these heats of contention and mischiefs of separation which have been caused in the Church of Christ thereby. And I here plainly aver that the Church of *England* cannot be guiltless in this matter, if she doth not on this opportunity, now put into her hands by this present meeting of the Convocation, doe something herein, and that especially since by an unwary expression in her Canons, wherein she hath explained this Ceremony to be that whereby the person baptized is dedicated to the service of Jesus Christ, she hath wrongfully attributed thereto the sacramental effect which belongs to Baptism onely, and thereby administred a great part of the occasion to all the divisions which have been risen about it.

2. As to the Surplice I am sufficiently satisfied that nothing is more unreasonable than those Cavils which are risen against it. For it is onely an habit of distinction, which the Minister for the sake of order and decency makes use of in the execution of his Function in the same manner as is practised in all other Offices and Professions of men, and those that except against it may as well except against the Robes of a Judge on the Bench, or the Gown of a Mayor when he presides in his Corporation, it being altogether as reasonable that a Minister should be distinguished by a proper habit in the execution of his Office, as they in theirs. But when
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through the malice of some in working strange objections against it into the minds of men, and the weakness of others in receiving and believing them, it is now become so great a stumbling-block of offence as to drive multitudes to forsake our Churches, and be disaffected to the Worship of God which is performed in them; whatsoever was the reason of its first appointment, sure I am that from hence there is a much greater totally to lay it aside, and appoint another that may be less offensive in its stead. The Union of the Church and the Benefit which the Souls of men may receive thereby being certainly things of far greater moment than to be sacrificed to so trivial a matter as that of a Garment.

3. Kneeling at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a posture so proper to that Holy Ordinance, that of all the Constitutions of our Church, this is the last I should be willing to part with; because I think the highest posture of Devotion is that which is always most natural for us to be in when we are receiving from Christ so great and inestimable Benefits as those which are reached out unto us in that Holy Mystery. But since the weakness of many who are good and well meaning men have been so far imposed on by several fallacious arguments which they have not skill enough to see through, as to think it sinfull to receive in this posture, and hereby the Table of the Lord becomes deserted, and the Souls of many deprived of the benefit of that Spiritual Food which is administered thereon, contrary to the intention of our Saviour, who hath by no means impowred us on any such account as this to debar men from Communion, and deprive them thereby of those Benefits of Salvation which we are sent to administer unto them, it is time for us now to abate of our rigor in this matter; and when we are not able to bring men up by reason of their weakness to the Constitutions of the

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the Church, be so far indulgent as to descend to them; and give them the Sacrament in their own way, rather than for the sake of a posture onely debar them of the Benefits which their Souls may receive thereby; and to doe otherwise I doubt will not onely be a Sin against Christian Charity, in prejudicing the Salvation of many, but also be an abuse of the Commission intrusted with us. For I can by no means be persuaded that Christ hath given us the power of the Keys to shut out those from the Benefits of this Sacrament who in all other respects being good and righteous men, have onely this weakness, that they cannot comply with us in receiving thereof in that posture which the Church prescribes, and for which it hath no other warrant but its own Constitutions. For how fitting a posture soever Kneeling may be for the receiving of this Sacrament, this must undeniably be allowed, that neither Scripture directs it, nor Antiquity ever used it; it having been for several ages after Christ the constant practice of all the Churches in the World to communicate Standing, and why this may not again by a particular dispensation from the present establishment be allowed to weak and scrupulous persons for the sake of peace and union with them, I can see no reason that favours either of a Christian temper or Christian Charity that can be said to the contrary.

4. As to the Liturgy of our Church I freely acknowledge, and I think no man can contradict me herein, that it is the best which was ever yet used in any Christian Church, but that it should therefore be so perfect as not to be capable of amendments or alterations for the better doth by no means follow. For nothing of humane composition can be such, especially in a thing of this nature, where process of time and alteration of circumstances frequently produce a necessity for correction, as most certain-

certainly in our Liturgy they very often doe. For the language in which it is wrote being constantly *in fluxu*, as all other living languages are, in every age some words that were in use in the former grow obsolete, and some phrases and expressions formerly in grace and fashion through disuse become uncouth and ridiculous, and always to continue these in our Liturgy without correction would be to bring a disparagement upon the whole, and expose to contempt the worship of God among us. Besides there are several things which in one age may conduce to devotion, which through variation of times and circumstances may not be born in another; several things which may be the proper matter of Prayer at one time which may not be so in another, and all those things call for alterations and amendments whenever they happen. And therefore I am so far from assenting with some of our Brethren in this particular, that our Liturgy ought not to be altered, that I think it absolutely necessary from the abovementioned particulars that it be always at least once in 30 years brought to a review for this purpose. And I am sure this hath been the judgment of the whole Christian Church from the beginning till this time. The Greek Church hath so often altered as to this, and made so many different forms of their Liturgies, that a Collection of them in a late Auction amounted to twenty Volumes; and the Latin Church who brag most of their constancy in these matters have rather exceeded than come behind them herein, as in the old Manuscripts of their Liturgies will sufficiently appear to any that will take the pains to look into them. Nay they were so far from continuing one age in conformity with another herein, that they observed none at all in this matter, but almost every Province had its different Liturgy, and it's well known that there were five different forms of them in this Kingdom till the Reformation, and the like was also

also practised in other parts of the Latin or Romish Church, and a general Agreement as to this was then so far from being thought necessary, That the Act of King *Edward* the VIth was the first Law for a uniform Liturgy in any Church that was ever enacted from the beginning of Christianity to that time. But neither did that exclude all varying from it in after times. The Liturgy that was first established in that King's reign, within a very little while after underwent a review, which produced very considerable alterations in it. And when *Q. Eliz.* came to the Crown many others were made therein. And those who compute the late alterations decreed in the Convocation of 1662. tell us they amount to the number of 400. And why we onely of this present time should be debarred the privilege of bettering our selves in this matter, which all other times of the Church before us have enjoyed, I would fain know a reason. Thus far sure I am that no time had ever more need to make use of it for the publick good than this in which we now live. For the Exigences of the State call loudly upon us to doe that herein which may tend to its safety, and the peace of the Church and the interest of Religion plead as hard on the other hand to the same purpose, for the removing of animosities and divisions, and the restoring of Union and Charity among us. And what can we say for our selves if we continue deaf as to all this? But to come to the Liturgy it self; are there not many things in it which with some shew of reason our dissenting Brethren except against? and are there not many more which we our selves heartily wish might be amended and improved? certainly, were there no other reason to induce us to comply with our Brethren that dissent from us, in making such alterations as would satisfie them, I should think this a very sufficient one, that we

that we have an opportunity given us at the same time also to gratifie our selves in such further alterations and improvements which we our selves desire. For must the Story of *Tobit* and his Dog and that of *Bell* and the Dragon always supplant Canonical Scripture in our Churches, and we be forced to read such ridiculousthings to our people instead of the Word of God? must we always be forced to read the old Translation of the Psalms, and impose that on the people for true Scripture, which in so great a number of places quite differs from it? must we always be forced in our address'es to God Almighty with a flattery not to be warranted, to call every King that reigns over us most Religious, though the whole tenor of his life may be quite the contrary; and pray that he may be kept and strengthened in the true worshipping of God, though openly professing so false a worship as that of Popery? And must we also be forced still to put that abuse upon the power of the Keys committed to our charge, as to excommunicate, and thereby thrust out of our Churches sometimes the best of our people for being right or wrong overthrown in some penny or twopenny Cause in our Ecclesiastical Courts? And must we always be necessitated to pronounce all damn'd that do not believe every tittle in *Athanasius's* Creed which so few do understand; and on the contrary to declare every man fav'd at his burial how wickedly foever he liv'd all his life before? And must we always be bound to many other grievances and defects of this nature, which I could tell you of, and still deny our selves all redress under the burden of them, by refusing all those desirable alterations and improvements which are now in our own power to effect, because some of our Brethren are obstinately bent to doe nothing for the satisfaction of those that dissent from us? In summ, it cannot be denied, but that there are many things in our

Liturgy which may be amended and improved, many defects in our Discipline and Constitutions which may be supplied, and abundance of other particulars in our Church which may receive a great advance for the better enabling us to promote Religion and Piety, and suppress sin and iniquity among us. And since the King and Parliament are now so well inclined to comply with us in all these particulars, which we have so often laboured for in vain in other times, provided that we will on our side doe what justly we may to satisfie our dissenting Brethren for the sake of peace and union among us, which the necessities of our present circumstances doe so much require for our common safety; it is a barter of that advantage on our side, that none I think can refuse that have any regard to the honour of God, the good of his Church, or the true interest of Religion among us.

But to all what I have said I very well know many objections will be made, which I daily hear from those who are of your opinion in this matter. The first is, That altering any thing in this now constituted Church will be like the plucking of a Beam out of a well built House, and that it cannot be done without endangering the whole Fabrick. To this I answer, If all had been of this mind we could never have reformed from Popery, because this Argument would have been as strong against all alterations then as now; but I thank God we altered for the better then, and still preserv'd our Church, and therefore I hope we may be able to doe so still without any prejudice thereto.

2. It is objected, If we once begin to alter, where shall we stop? To this I answer, Whensoever any thing is proposed to us which is not fit to be done.

3. It's objected, If we yield now, they will still be craving more, and never rest till at last they have taken all

all from us. To which I answer, When they doe this, then it will be time enough to resist them; in the *interim* let us not refuse them what is just and fitting for us to grant them, lest thereby we make good the old Saying, *Omnia dat qui justa negat*; and we give them an advantage against us, by our obstinate rigor against yielding any thing, to get that power on their side which may deprive us of all.

4. It's objected, That some of those alterations which they require are in things as ancient as the Primitive Church, from which we ought not to vary, as may be instanced in the Cross in Baptism. To which I answer, That we are not bound to retain all things that were used in the Primitive Church. For if so, why have we not still their Love-feasts and their Deaconesses, which have been long since disused in all Christian Churches, and yet the mention of them is as ancient as the Scriptures themselves. For in truth it is not ancient usage, but the necessities and exigencies of the Church that are the reasons of all its constitutions and establishments, which are to be framed in every Age as will best fute with the promoting of the honour of God, and the edification of his People, to which abundance of things might very well serve in the primitive times, which will not now; and therefore to say, that what was in use in the primitive times must be retained now for this reason onely without any other to enforce it is just the same as if we were bound to revive all the old *Saxon* and *British* Laws, because they were the ancient Constitutions of this Land, without considering whether they are usefull to us or no.

5. The fifth Objection is, That it will be a reproach to change. To which I answer, That it will be a much greater reproach obstinately to resist a change when there is good reason for it. And therefore I cannot approve

the confidence of that Gentleman, who hath lift up his banner against the whole intent and design of this Convocation, with a *Nolumus Leges Angliæ mutare*. For doth he think we are bound never to make any new Constitutions in our Church, or abolish old ones, according as the exigencies of it doe require? If so, why have we any Convocations at all? for is not the whole intent and reason of these assemblies of the Clergy of this Church, to consider its grievances and corruptions in the same manner as the Parliament doth those of the State, and from time to time, in like manner, provide remedies for them, and that by abolishing old Constitutions, as well as by decreeing new ones? and hath not the Church ever asserted this power as one of the most essential things which belong to its Constitution? and must it now renounce all this for the sake of this Gentleman's *motto*? and now, in this critical time, when its safety doth so much depend upon what it shall doe for it self, rather sit quietly down and languish to death, than make the least motion of effort to save it self. If this be it which this Gentleman would have, we have no reason to thank him either for his Speech or his *Motto*, the last of which, I suppose, pleased him best, because it carried a double stab with it, the one against the Church, and the other against him that was his greatest benefactor to promote him in it.

6. The sixth Objection is, That we have no reason to alter any thing for the sake of Dissenters, because the fault of our divisions is not from any Constitutions of ours, but from their obstinacy and perverseness in unreasonably dissenting from them. To which I answer, That I acknowledge all this to be true, that it is not the Church which is the Cause of our divisions by any of its constitutions or impositions, which are all rational and good, but they onely who refuse to conform to them.

them. But it doth not follow therefore, that when nothing else will remove the divisions now raised among us on the account of these things, or again reduce Dissenters to the Unity of the Church, but some alterations in them, (which without the least prejudice to our Church, or the Worship of God therein we may lawfully make) it may not be a great fault in us now to be over obstinate in these matters, and that we ought not rather when there is before us so great a good, as the Peace of the Church and the Salvation of so many therein (which it's to be fear'd may be too much obstructed by these divisions) be ready to comply with them as far as lawfully we may for the sake hereof. For they being the weak and the infirm whom we are sent to heal, our part to them must be that of a Physician, who, when he finds his Patient, through that peevishness which is commonly incident to the sick, obstinately refuse an wholesome medicine which he prescribes him, doth not for this reason immediately cast off all care of him, but thinks of something else more agreeable to his palate and humour, that may doe as well.

7. The seventh Objection is, If we make those alterations and so often change, how shall we answer the Papists, who will upbraid us with it? To this I answer, As well as we did in the first of *Queen Elizabeth*, and in 1662. or, if this be an Objection, as well as they can us for their alterations by the Council of *Trent*, the late reformation of their Mass-books at *Paris*, and the last Pope's abolishing several Offices concerning the *Virgin Mary*.

8. The eighth Objection is, We shall by these alterations dissatisfie our own People. To which I answer, Why more now than in 1662. when all readily complied with and approved the like alterations? but I believe more noise is made of this Objection, than there is truth

truth or reason in it ; perchance there may be some few ignorant and weak People , that may be over zealously affected to these matters among us, but they being our own , I hope are capable of being better instructed by us , than to think any of those things in which the alterations are desired so sacred as not to be meddled with : For this is to attribute that to the appointments of men, which is due onely to the Divine institutions, and is a sinfull superstition, in which they ought by no means to be indulged, but are as to this to be corrected, and better informed by us, under whose care they are.

And thus far having shewn you what necessity is upon us to consent to the alterations that will be proposed in this present Convocation , from the great obligation we have to remove the Scisms and heal the Divisions that are among us, I shall in the second place shew you another reason of this necessity from the promise , whereby we have obliged our selves so to doe. For the Bishops, in their Petition to King *James*, promised that they would come to a temper with the Dissenters, whenever put in a legal way , and this promise all the Clergy in the Land have seemed to approve of by owning that Petition in which it was contained, as they all plainly did who refused to read that King's Declaration in compliance therewith ; and therefore now we are put in a legal way by being called together in Convocation , we are bound to make this Promise good. For hereby we have not only raised the expectations of the Dissenters, but also of the whole Nation too, who are earnest for the sake of the publick good and peace of the Kingdom, that the differences between us should be composed ; and if we doe nothing in compliance herewith , what can we expect , but that the general clamour of the People will be raised against us hereon, as a base and false sort of men, who can promise fair in times of adversity , and forget all perfor-

performances when they are over, and we become the reproach of every man hereon. I know the answer hereto is, that the Dissenters will do nothing on their part towards this temper, and that after all that we can doe on ours we cannot have assurance that any one of them will come over to us thereon, and therefore it will be in vain for us to proceed any further on this Project. To which I reply, First, That it is by no means true that all Dissenters are so averse to a reconciliation with us, as this answer suggests, for I know multitudes that on granting the alterations proposed would most gladly come in and unite themselves to us. That their Ministers are not so forward as to this I believe to be true, because they having many of them very beneficial Conventicles, where they have a more plentiful Income, greater respects, and a larger power than they can hope for in a Church Benefice, would rather for the sake of self interest continue as they are, and have no Comprehension at all, than to be brought into the Church thereby to their loss. But with the People I know it will be otherwise, who will in large numbers come in to us as soon as those alterations shall be in our Churches; and when they are once come off, it will not be long ere their Ministers also will be forced to follow. But, Secondly, suppose it true, That no Dissenter at all would be brought over to us by the Concessions proposed, yet I say that we are still bound as well by interest as duty to perform what we have promised: For by doing our part herein, first, we shall leave them without excuse, if they be not satisfied thereon, and deliver our selves from abundance of their clamour, which we are now continually vexed with by them on this account. Secondly, we shall thereby give satisfaction to the Nation, who expect this from us, and fix them thereby the more firmly to us. For say we what we will of the strength and number of those
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that are for us, let us not deceive our selves, As they that are zealous for the Dissenters are no great number, neither are they that are zealous for us. The main body of the Nation I look on to stand indifferently affected both to them and us, and although they now come to our Churches, yet are they as ready to joyn also with them were they in the publick Ministry, as in the times of *Cromwell* hath been sufficiently made appear. For they think not the Controversie between us of that moment, and therefore cry loudly to us to agree, and take it very ill that such discords and divisions should be still maintained in the Nation so much to the prejudice of the publick peace and safety about such trifling matters as they think them to be which we contend with each other about. And at present I must tell you they are readier to cast the blame of all this rather on us than them because they are now the suffering party. But if we do our part on this occasion, and make all those steps to peace and agreement which are proposed, we shall not onely set our selves right with them as to this, but if the Dissenters do not hereon come in and comply with us, they will so plainly manifest themselves thereby to be a sort of obstinate and unreasonable people, that the whole Nation shall condemn them and justifie us, and be thereby firmly fixed on our side ever after. But on the contrary if we do not our part, but break our promises, and reject the present opportunity put into our hands of doing our best towards the restoring peace to this poor divided Church and Nation, which all now so earnestly desire, and the exigency of our present affairs do make so necessary for our safety, we shall so far lose the people of the Land, and give our Adversaries that advantage over us thereby, as I fear may become our total ruine.

But, Thirdly, another reason there is which shews the necessity of our doing what is propos'd, because if we do

not doe it moſt certainly the Parliament will. For it may be very well remembred, that in the laſt Seſſions the Bill paſt the Houſe of Lords in order hereto, and when it came down into the Houſe of Commons it was by their deſire that the matter was referred to us, and if we now do nothing in it, you may aſſure your ſelf the Parliament will reſume it again, and doe it their own way, and they have the whole thanks for it, and we onely the odium of the whole Nation for reſuſing it. To prevent which let us not caſt the preſent opportunity out of our hands of doing the thing our ſelves: for we as Divines are beſt able to doe it as it ought without prejudice to the Church, whereas if we caſt it into the hands of Laymen, they may inſtead of altering Circumſtantials ſtrike at Eſſentials, and ſo make a breach upon the Religion it ſelf to the undoing of all. And although this ſhould be avoided, as I feare it will not in ſome particulars I could inſtance, as particularly in that of our Orders, yet the leaſt miſchief we can expect will be totally to extinguiſh all Convocations for the future, and reſolve the whole power of the Church into the two Houſes of Parliament, and thereby perpetually fix that reproach of the Papiſts upon us, that our Religion is a Parliamentary Religion. And whether the Church of *England* is now met together onely to be *felo de ſe* is that which the Members of this preſent Convocation are earneſtly deſired to conſider.

But in answer to all this your third head of Objection tells us, That how neceſſary ſoever this may be from the abovementioned Reaſons, yet this is no proper time for it, when ſo many of the Fathers of our Church, and other eminent perſons of the Clergy by their Suspension ſtand incapacitated to act with us in this matter, and that becauſe if this be now done, when their conſent cannot be had in the doing of it, they will renounce it all,

and by sticking to the present Form create a new Schism among us, and thereby as great a breach be made in the Church on the one hand, as possibly can be made up on the other. And this I hear is a reason much insisted on to defeat the whole design and intent of this Convocation. But in answer hereto I must tell you those excellent persons are very little beholding to them that talk of them at this rate, there being nothing that can be a more bitter Libel against them. For is it possible to imagine that those who have so eminently signallized themselves in the defence of the Church, and so readily yielded themselves to be Confessors for it (as all well know in the late Reign) should now on a sudden turn their hands against it to wound and destroy it, and all this onely out of a desperate peevishness, because they have some infelicities at present upon them which none of us can help. Far be it from those eminent Fathers of the Church to become guilty of so great a wickedness against it, and I must tell you it is impossible they ever should, whatsoever some men may talk hereof to serve their own purpose. For how can they who have so long preached and wrote against Schism and the wickedness of it in separating from the Church without a just cause, now become guilty hereof themselves, when there is no cause at all to drive them to it? Should we indeed put any thing either into our Liturgy or Constitutions, which is contrary either to the Doctrine or the Precepts of our Religion, I must confess then there would be reason for them to separate, and I my self would make one of their number; but those that are most hot against the design of this present Convocation do not tell us that any thing of this is likely to be done therein, and therefore we may suppose the Liturgy after its present review will have nothing of this therein, and that any then should separate
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from us in that where they can find no fault to object is a thing that cannot be imagined, but of such onely as are most perversly bent against Reason and Conscience to doe all the wickedness they can to gratifie a preevish humour. And therefore those that talk after this rate of those excellent and most Religious persons have a great deal to answer for to them for the injury which they doe them by this slanderous and vile imputation. But since they will have it so we will for once (begging their pardon for doing so) suppose what they suggest to be true, that those who are now of so tender a Conscience in reference to the Oaths, will have none at all as to this which is a much plainer case, but go on in opposition to all which we shall do in this present Convocation to make that Schism which they would fright us with, the hurt will be so little which they will be able to doe us thereby, as that it will not need either to be feared or regarded by us. For their number is so small, and the Profelytes they are like to get so few, and the resentments of the State will be so heavy upon them, as being enemies to them as well as us in this opposition, that they can no sooner appear in the Schism which is talked so much of, but they must immediately be crush'd and fall to nothing, and therefore to talk of this as some do, in so formidable a manner for the obstructing all the good intentions of this present Convocation, is a Scare-crow which Knaves may lift up, but none but Fools can be frighted therewith.

And thus far having shewn you the necessity which urgeth us to doe what may become us in this present Convocation, methinks the case is so plain, that I cannot imagine from whence it is that the present opposition may arise, unless it be that some, when they hear of Reformation, are afraid of their Church power and

Church promotions. If this be the matter, as I doubt it is, that makes so many hang off from the publick good of the Church at this time, I desire they would consider whether they doe not take the most effectual course to bring that about which they fear. If by such moderate abatements as are required we give satisfaction to the Nation, they will be the better inclined to bear with us in all things else, and make the continuance of our establishments more lasting among them. But if on the contrary, by our refusal, we provoke them against us, I know not but that, instead of that moderate and just reformation which they will now be contented with, they may take the matter into their own hands, and bring us to that of *Scotland*, which we are so much afraid of, and deprive us of all. And of this we have a plain instance in the Case of the Council of *Trent*. Had they granted any moderate Concessions to the just demands of the *Germans*, and yielded them but some of those things which are now a burthen to them, and which they would be gladly rid of, if they could with reputation, I doubt not the Church of *Rome* might have retained its power over the whole Latin Church till this time; but their jealousy of this power making them rigorous to yield nothing, hath put them in the direct way to lose all. And if we follow the same course, I doubt the same effect will ensue. In summ, such bye ends are always most unjustifiable in Ecclesiastical Councils, in which no considerations of secular interest, but those onely which may best tend to the Honour of God and the Salvation of men ought to influence all our determinations, and could we but all come together with this mind, I should think our selves so sure of the blessing of God upon all our endeavours, that I durst promise you all the good success from this Convocation that can be desired, whatever appearance there may at present be to the contrary.

As to the account which you desire of our Proceedings hitherto, I can onely tell you, that on Monday last we chose our Prolocutor, and adjourned to this day, and are now again adjourned till Monday next, and then we expect to have our Commission to act and fall to business. The first thing to be brought before us will be the reformation of the Kalendar, that is, whether the Apocryphal Lessons shall be struck out or no; and here I apprehend the main Question will come to the debate, whether Alterations, or no Alterations: If the latter be carried, you will have your desire, and I my liberty again to return home, where the old saying, *Quos Deus perdet dementat*, must necessarily have that influence upon my mind, as to make me fear our total ruin cannot be long behind after so great an infatuation; if it must be so, I am ture our sins have deserved it, and God endue us with Patience to submit thereto. I am,

Sir,

Nov. 27.
1689.

Your affectionate humble servant,

A. B.

F I N I S.

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