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The principal Claims of the Dissenters,
considered, in

A

S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

At S^r. PHILIP'S CHURCH,

In B I R M I N G H A M,

On SUNDAY the 14th of FEBRUARY, 1790.

* * Some Notes have been since added.



B I R M I N G H A M :

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P R E F A C E.

TO the public at large, and especially to the inhabitants of Birmingham, the following discourse is respectfully offered from the press. Its publication was first suggested by the request of many before whom it has been lately delivered from the pulpit. The subject, it is true, has been fully treated by much abler advocates; but it is presumed that local publications have at least a local advantage, as the means of information within a given limit, in preference to works of much greater merit from a distant quarter. In this light only, the author has been reconciled to the public appearance of his sermon; the possibility of rendering any service, however *limited*, to the great CONSTITUTIONAL CAUSE, which the subject involves, as it is the best apology, so is it the chief motive; for the present publication. In aid of that apology it is added, that if any little profits should arise from the sale of this discourse, the mite so obtained will be gladly offered to any fund of public charity in Birmingham, which may deem it acceptable.



TITUS, chap. iii. verses 1, 2.

PUT THEM IN MIND TO BE SUBJECT TO PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS, TO OBEY MAGISTRATES, TO BE READY TO EVERY GOOD WORK ;

TO SPEAK EVIL OF NO MAN, TO BE NO BRAWLERS, BUT GENTLE, SHEWING ALL MEEKNESS TO ALL MEN.

THE text might induce me to consider, *generally*, the duties of mankind in a state of society. But I merely offer it at this time as a proper introduction of my sentiments upon a *particular infraction* of those duties, in the instance of certain dissatisfied members of our public body.

The instance alluded to has lately, it is true, been canvassed* in this place with superior ability, and therefore I should rather have declined so unpleasant a subject (especially as it seems, in some lights, not immediately placed within the best province of the pulpit) if the pointed language of invective, and the dark insinuations of slander, did not appear

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* By the Rev. Dr. Croft, in a sermon since published: and by the Rev. Mr. Clutton, late lecturer of St. Martin's, Birmingham, whose sermon it is feared will not be published.

to require an *express refutation*, from every minister of the Established Church. The Dissenters, it seems, have represented many of our order as being *secretly their friends* upon that extravagant subject which is now obtruded, for the *third* time, on the notice of our present parliament, alledging the particular violence which conscientious ministers must experience from the operation of the test laws.

Without further preface, then, I offer you thus publickly, the following (imperfect) observations on that subject, as a mode of declaring the settled principles and conviction of my heart, as I hope for mercy from the God of truth.

The indispenfible necessity of some national church (A) in every civilized state, is so clear in itself. and so capable of abundant proof, that it may rather be affirmed as an axiom, than offered as a proposition. And the arguments which assert an inseparable union of our civil and religious interests (whatever theoretical distinctions may be made between civil actions and religious opinions) have been generally allowed to be satisfactory and conclusive, although the Protestant Dissenters have undertaken to maintain a contrary doctrine, to palliate their conduct on the subject of the test laws.

laws. They have received an ample refutation on this head (B) from many distinguished writers. But an unprejudiced man, I should conceive, would satisfy himself at once by answering this single question: What civilized state was ever known permanent and flourishing, unconnected with some system of religious tenets? Every state then and its national church, have a mutual connection and a reciprocal interest.

Now it is self-evident that this national church cannot subsist in security, or discharge its engagements in the contract formed between church and state for their mutual support and prosperity, if the state should equally encourage and promote *other* systems of religion essentially repugnant to the tenets of that national church. This then is exactly the case in this country, between the state, the Church of England, and the Non-conformists. The question therefore is, Should the present church establishment retain a tried security, or should it be made *liable to a gradual subversion*; since it is undeniably evident that either the episcopal or some sectary-establishment must be *uppermost in power*? From the very nature of *all things human*, a perpetual rivalry and a just jealousy will unavoidably prevail between parties of discordant sentiments yet of equal power: and

consequently whenever any sect of Dissenters shall be admitted to that equal power, the Established Church must become endangered. This reasoning by no means militates against the most ample toleration (C) towards all sects whatever, for the peaceable exercise of their own worship. It admits the fullest liberty of conscience and opinion; but it excludes at discretion, all sectaries whatever, from offices of *trust* and *power*, in the civil or religious departments of the existing establishment.

It is further to be considered, that the Presbyterian principles are unquestionably republican. Can the state receive, then, a security from *them* equal to the safety which it enjoys from the principles of the Church of England, in the important particulars of allegiance to the King, and of attachment to that regal prerogative which is an *essential* branch of the constitution? Have not these abettors of a republican system been already *tried* upon this point to the great sorrow and distress of the nation; and are they *now* to be re-admitted into power, in competition with that church, whose members are the firm and exemplary friends of the present constitution in *all* its branches; inviolably attached to that limited monarchy which forms the happiness of king and people; in competition with that church, whose principles

ensure

ensure, in the true spirit of its divine founder, the most liberal and extensive charity, even to its declared enemies: not seeking or wishing to abuse its powers, even in this moment of turbulent dissention; but patiently trying to recall the assailants to a more peaceable line of conduct, and to the contented exercise of every requisite or reasonable liberty? Nay, instead of being violent, resentful or impatient, instead of being desirous to retaliate upon those assailants with severity or with any unnecessary restraints, are we not too justly upbraided with a passive and supine conduct, not seldom accused of having deserted our trust, and branded with the charge of lukewarm, negligent and pusillanimous behaviour in a cause of the most interesting and sacred nature?

It has been well observed that the English papist might almost as reasonably contend for power in the state as our present opponents: and indeed (as things are now circumstanced) there is little or no difference in the degree of danger which the prevalence of either of these parties must occasion to the Church of England. To justify this assertion, it is necessary to remark, that the principles of the Socinian doctrine in this place are evidently gaining ground among the Presbyterians, and certainly
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those principles are not more consistent with the doctrine of the Established Church, and no less dangerous to the state, than any of the tenets of popery.

So again, it is observable, that the Presbyterians may already shew a precedent in the conduct of their ancestors, for *uniting* their cause with that of the Roman Catholics: a strong presumption this, that the present century might also be distinguished by a similar union (I do not say with what cordiality or consistency of conduct) if they fortunately could find the Papists as numerous or *zealous* as themselves. Indeed, reason is already given us to expect, that if the Dissenters should be successful, the Roman Catholics will soon imitate their conduct. (D)

Be this as it may, it were absurd to suppose that the Dissenters, if in power, would not wish to effect the subversion of our present establishment: and we certainly have no adequate barrier against their admission to that power but the very objects of their present attack. How far they may be credited when they disclaim all wishes for emolument or pretensions to power in the church; how far they would shew themselves superior to those motives which are apt to influence the rest of mankind; how far self-denial, moderation and
humility

humility, may constitute the distinguishing characteristics of their sect, will perhaps deserve some little consideration, before they shall receive an exclusive credit for these virtues.

At all events, their clamorous and, I must say, *violent* proceedings, their restless remonstrances against the deliberate and repeated decisions of the legislature, *demanding* a *concession* of their just *rights* (as they are pleased to say) the passionate language of their public advertisements, their mode of addressing, and their attempts to influence 'every member of the house of commons, and every peer of the realm,' are but ill specimens of that temper and of those principles which alone could justify (if any thing could justify) our opening the constitution to their interference, and eventually trusting to their moderation. Did no other argument exist against the repeal of the test laws, their own conduct and the language which some of their leaders do not scruple to use (E) (though others seem to think that language premature, and impolitic) would furnish an unanswerable argument against them at the present day, as it has uniformly done in time past!

They solemnly disavow, as I have already observed, all motives of ambition and every interested view. What then do they want?
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Have they not the fullest toleration in the exercise of their own mode of worship? Have they not the fullest liberty of conscience and opinion? Do they not frequent their places of worship as secure from molestation as ourselves; and are they not as much protected by the laws? Most certainly they are, and most certainly they ought to be!

It is needless, however, to vindicate the church from the charge of intolerant or persecuting principles, when the Dissenters themselves are a perpetual and most express proof of our contrary conduct, as they are under no single disability which can possibly be avoided *consistently with our own security*: that is, they are simply excluded from offices of civil or ecclesiastical power, because their possession of those offices has been *proved incompatible* with the welfare of the Established Church, and with the safety of the civil government.

But is this intolerance? Is this persecution? to grant every thing which can possibly be requisite for their full enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, and only to withhold from them *the means of injuring* the present establishment? They speak of hardships and of punishments, but they hold a most ungrateful language: where is the hardship or the punishment which they suffer? Where is the
proper

proper meaning of those violent expressions? They are subject to restraint indeed in the instance of actual power, but a necessary restraint in that respect, is, in candour and common sense, very far distant from punishment or hardship, especially when the cause of that restraint originates in *themselves*. I by no means intend an indiscriminate censure against a body of men where many most respectable individuals may be found, and it gives me the highest satisfaction to declare that the language of which I thus complain is by no means universally adopted: many well-disposed and ingenuous members of that body have been known to allow that they enjoy an *ample toleration*; (F) that they have good reason to be satisfied with the liberality of government, and with the equitable conduct of the Church of England. What are we to think then of the views and complaints of their more violent brethren? Is there no reason to distrust their assurances though they reprobate in so 'decided a tone' the imputation of interested wishes, positively disclaiming all 'latent ambition,' all 'aspiring hopes' of ecclesiastical honour and emoluments? Is there no reason to receive with suspicion their declarations of 'reverence to the government' and of 'loyalty to the king' (however speciously and pompously announced) when the amount of that reverence has been exactly ascertained by a woeful experience

perience of republican tyranny, and the extent of that loyalty has been exactly delineated with the blood of a king.

But the Dissenters charge us with a prostitution of religion to interested and secular views in the instance of the sacramental test. Surely they require some further acquaintance with the scriptures, if they yet have to learn that lesson which their ancestors would have done well to regard, that religion is a friend to civil government; that the scriptures repeatedly inculcate a dutiful submission to magistrates and rulers, and that consequently, the security of our governors and the acknowledgment of their authority cannot fail to be immediate objects of religious care. It will be sufficient to select the few following passages from scripture.

'The apostle to the Romans saith, ' Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers :
' for there is no power but of God : the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil, wilt thou then not be afraid of the power ? Do that which is good, and thou shalt

' shalt have praise of the same. For he is the
 ' minister of God to thee for good: but if
 ' thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for
 ' he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is
 ' the minister of God, a revenger to execute
 ' wrath upon him that doeth evil.'

' Wherefore ye must needs be subject not
 ' only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.
 ' For, for this cause pay ye tribute also, for
 ' they are God's ministers, attending continu-
 ' ally upon this very thing. Render therefore
 ' to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is
 ' due: custom to whom custom: fear to
 ' whom fear: honour to whom honour.' Ro-
 mans, chap. xiii.

So likewise an authority which we hold to
 be superior to that of man, hath expressly com-
 manded us (according to *three* of our evange-
 lists) to 'render unto Cæsar the things
 ' which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things
 ' which are God's.' St. Matthew, xxii. 21.—
 St. Mark xii. 17.—St. Luke xx. 25.

' Submit yourselves (saith St. Peter) to
 ' every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake,
 ' whether it be to the King as supreme, or
 ' unto them that are sent by him for the
 ' punishment of evil doers, and for the praise
 of

‘ of them that do well.’ St. Peter 1st. epistle, ii. 13, 14.

‘ As free, and not using your liberty as
‘ a cloke of malicioufness, but as the ser-
‘ vants of God.’ Ibid. verse 16th.

‘ My son, (saith Solomon,) fear thou the
‘ Lord and the King, and meddle not with
‘ them that are given to change.’ Proverbs
xxiv. 21.

I would finally remind you of the passage from St. Paul to Titus which constitutes my text: ‘ Put them in mind to be subject to
‘ principalities and powers, to obey *magi-*
‘ *strates*, to be ready to every good work,
‘ to speak evil of no man, to be no brawl-
‘ ers, but gentle, shewing all meekness to
‘ all men.’

What now do the test laws require? To obey the civil powers is a precept of religion. Is it not then an actual compliance with that precept, not a ‘ *profanation of religion*’, to certify our obedience by a religious act? The propriety of this measure could hardly be deemed liable to just objection, if it were enjoined by every state in respect to every individual living under its laws:
but

but, when that individual is called and admitted into civil or religious offices, (G) and consequently entrusted with a share of that government which depends upon the *due* and *faithful* discharge of those offices, can it be unreasonable, can it be *irreligious*, to require an express promise of his fidelity, a direct proof of his attachment to the constitution of his country, both in church and state, through the medium of a religious appeal? In every state the allegiance of a subject entrusted with power must be an object of high consequence, nor can any pledge of that allegiance be too sacred, or too solemn. The legislature endeavours therefore to provide (H) for the security of that state by those means which ought to be *effectual* with every man, as the *strongest* and *most awful* which can possibly be used; after which the conduct of that subject must rest with his own conscience. To urge against laws the violation of those laws is erroneous and unjust: To argue therefore from the occasional abuse of the sacramental test, is to deny the expediency of a legal oath because perjury is a sin.

Let us now consider, in conclusion, some few of those grievances which are so loudly execrated by the Presbyterian and Socinian writers, when they descend to the particulars of their situation. The deprivation of natural and un-

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alienable

alienable rights (which is their *first* grievance) is in truth a heavy charge against the government in this boasted land of liberty: but a moment's consideration will shew us the fallacy of their argument in this instance, and the injustice of that charge. It has indeed a captivating effect upon us to be told of equal liberty and of the natural rights of mankind: but the best and truest positions, may be misapplied and perverted: perhaps in no instance more fatally than in the present. Besides, it is observable, that the doctrine of our *equal condition* is particularly pleasing to those minds which are least capable of judging of its *truth*, *propriety*, and *extent*. It wins them with an influence imperceptible indeed, but strong, natural and lasting! I need not expatiate, however, upon those scenes of confusion and universal distress, which would immediately result from a *practical* illustration of this plausible *theory*!

Nor can I be induced to think that even the abettors of this popular argument for our natural and equal rights can seriously intend, for *their own sakes*, what their assertions inculcate, and what their principles would establish. Where are we to stop then, in this levelling idea? Where are we to draw the line? And indeed, granting the full force of theoretical positions in favour of those *natural rights*, yet,
living

living as we do in a state of *civilized society*, every good citizen will readily admit the *necessity* of *restraining* those rights for the regulation, the welfare, and the happiness of the community: nor can I conceive a more necessary or just restriction than that which enables the established government to distribute its offices, its honours and emoluments, in favour of *those only* whose principles conform to the established religion. (I) This, at least I may affirm, That they who can deny the expediency and equity of such a limitation are by no means the fittest objects for an *exception to this rule*.

The penal statute of King William against blasphemy is a *second* grievance. Now the doctrine of the trinity, we know, is a most sacred and fundamental article of the national creed. This the dissenters think proper to reject, and they are at *liberty* to reject it. But they go still further, they insult us with the charge of idolatry on account of this doctrine, they are at *liberty* to do *this also*, through the mildness of our principles; though perhaps they cannot have a *right* to do it upon any principle whatever. It is a circumstance *well known*, that in their ordinary discourse and in their frequent publications, they abuse this liberty without scruple and without molestation. Their conventicles are duly protected

by the laws; and their pastors are permitted to disseminate their doctrines with the utmost assiduity and zeal! Then surely the *professed* candour of these sectaries, instead of magnifying an imaginary grievance, instead of seeking to inflame the public mind with absurd apprehensions of a dormant statute, ought rather to approve itself by acknowledging the lenity of *such ample toleration!*

On the subject of this and every other penal statute which the act of toleration may have left unrepealed, it will be sufficient to offer these additional remarks. The application of penal laws in general, to matters of religion shall be readily condemned; nevertheless I argue that the *total removal* of an *effectual system* of defence against the innovations of sectaries (and such the test and corporation acts in particular have been proved by long experience to be) for the purpose of a single alteration in the *structure* of *one part* would be *at all times* an unwise and unsafe measure; but especially in the moment of a general attack upon that system: perfectly convinced as we likewise are, that the enlightened state of society must for ever form an ample security for separatists of every denomination, that no actual severity can possibly be enforced against them. Ought they not, therefore, to rest satisfied and thankful? Is it not enough, even in
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the instance of that exaggerated grievance, the statute of King William, that the Dissenters may exercise their raillery, their eloquence, their learning, by night and day, in private and in public, without *reasonable* fears of any kind, except those which conscience should occasion? Is it not enough that they can act unmolested in this manner in degradation of a doctrine which we solemnly receive as a most *sacred* and *essential* truth? Will nothing suffice to evince our moderation but a proof of our apostacy? Can we only be tolerant by becoming blasphemous? Let them name a modern instance of the misapplication of this statute, and the motives of this outcry will appear less suspicious. In a word, I will admit that a rigorous execution of it would certainly be intolerance, but a deliberate repeal of it would as *certainly* operate as a *virtual sanction* for that conduct which it was enacted to restrain!

The last pretended grievance which I shall at present notice, (and perhaps it is the chief of their grievances) is the payment of tythes and fees to the ministers of the Church of England; that is, the Dissenters complain that the provision which is appropriated to the support of those ministers who discharge the offices and duties of the religion of this country, as

established by law, may not be reduced and withdrawn at the caprice of sectaries, for the support of non-conformists.

The mere statement of this grievance is its best answer: but when we consider, further, the *avowed object* of this modest complaint, we certainly cannot deem it a *conclusive proof* of that *disinterested spirit*, which is professed by the Dissenters in disclaiming all wishes for the *emoluments* of the Church. Besides, it is observable that no individuals can be justified in pleading their particular opinions and objections against the operation of a general law, enacted to defray any public expenditure, which the state may incur, for national services of *any* kind. Be the purpose civil or religious, which a public provision is appointed to support, shall a citizen withhold his legal contribution because he dislikes that provision? This then is exactly the case respecting the maintenance of those ministers who are appointed to officiate in the national Church.

Such are my sentiments, and such is my *sincere conviction* on the general merits of the case before us; but the cursory nature of the foregoing remarks will, I fear, not justify the length to which this discourse has been carried.

The question becomes now very generally understood: the public attention has been happily awakened; and the public opinion begins to declare itself. Men observe the fallacy of that specious reasoning, and the *real drift* of those false arguments, which are so artfully stated, and so industriously circulated, by the deputies and agents of those *modern districts* which escaped the ingenuity of an *Alfred*.

They condemn the improper and unreason-able claims of all encroaching sectaries, and perceive the danger which our happy constitution would incur, if the rashness of the present age should remove those barriers which the wisdom of a former age has erected for its defence; and which the experience of a century has proved to be effectual. Happily preserved through that long period, from the disastrous and fatal convulsions of preceding times, on the subject of religion, the nation cannot watch with *too much jealousy*, (K) every step of innovation upon blessings so unspeakably important: blessings, as well civil as religious, which are not only inestimable in their value, but unparalleled in their degree!

May the ALMIGHTY, then, dispose the favoured inhabitants of this free country to *know*
their

their present happiness; and transmit it, without risque of injury, to their latest posterity!

Aware on the one hand that liberty may run into licentiousness; aware on the other hand that moderation may sink into supineness; may the *good* and *peaceable* of every denomination (whatever be their party, their politics, their religion) unitedly display a *temperate* but *firm* aversion from all *possible encroachments upon our present peace*: duly impressed with a sense of this truth, that the British government, in church and state *already* allows to *all* its subjects every civil and religious liberty which *can be* consistent with its own security; or properly granted upon any principle of justice, any dictate of reason, any precept of religion!

So may our present *univalled constitution* inflexibly resist every *speculative change*, every *dangerous innovation*; So may it continue *unimpaired for ages*, neither betrayed by artifice, nor invaded by violence; neither shaken by the *spirit of dissention*, nor contaminated by the *Dæmon of heresy*! (L)

N O T E S.

(A) Were it not for that sense of virtue which is principally preserved as far as it is preserved by *national forms and habits of religion*, men would soon lose it all, run wild, prey upon one another, and do what else the worst of savages do. —Wollaston's religion of nature delineated P. 124. 4to edition 1725.

(B) See particularly Warburton's alliance, between church and 'state'; 'Sherlock's arguments against a repeal, &c.' See also many essays or tracts of Swift upon the subject.

(C) Toleration, properly so called, is the middle line between *Persecution and Establishment*.

There cannot be a greater proof of perfect toleration in the principles and practice of the English government than in the following instance: Dissenters are indeed not eligible as magistrates for an obvious reason, but where they can possibly be employed with safety or utility, they are considered as eligible as other men; even to the admission of them as *members of the legislature*.

(D) It is proper to remark, in this place, that one of their most respectable and learned teachers has the following passage in a late publication. 'With regard to the tests I have nothing to say. When the Protestant Dissenters have procured relief from them, then it will be our time to apply; not that in any instance I conceive ourselves to be *less deserving* of notice than they are; but because as long as it shall seem expedient to the legislature, not to listen to the claims of so powerful, so wealthy, and so learned a body, we in silence shall submit to the hard restraints. I speak as an individual.' —The rights of dissenters, &c. by the Rev. Joseph Berington, last page of the pamphlet.

(E) See the 10th resolution of the meeting of Dissenters at Leicester; and see Dr. Priestley's letter to Mr. Pitt.

N. B. However artfully the above resolution may be stated, the declared sentiments and designs of popular and distinguished leaders form a just and necessary Criterion of the probable conduct of their parties.

(F) There is great reason to believe that a very considerable number of the old Presbyterians or calvinists may be included in the present remark. At all events they are certainly not the movers or leaders of the present measures. This was the language of the genuine Calvinists, who protested against the application to Parliament in the year 1772.

'From

‘ From the power of such *pretenders to superior reason*, may God and the British Government, ever de end the Orthodox Dissenters !

See further Bishop Horsley’s Tracts in controversy with Dr. Priestley, page 388, &c. last octavo edition, where the Bishop fully proves, ‘ that the genuine Calvinists among our modern Dissenters are very few.’

(G) It is a discouraging circumstance in the present question that the repeal of the test and corporation acts, if ever it should happen, would only be a prelude to many more claims. ‘ We should ask *many things more* (says Dr. Priestley,) that we conceive ourselves *entitled to*, and which it will be no injury but an advantage to our country to grant us. We are a part of the community which in return for *great merit* have received great injury. I shall therefore beg leave to tell you (as he presently proceeds to say) what it is that we do want, and what we *shall certainly claim some time or other* : I shall afterwards speak to other things which I conceive would be for the honour and advantage of this country, and which we or our more enlightened posterity will probably be aiming at *after all our claims as Dissenters are granted.*’ See Dr. Priestley’s letters to Mr. Pitt. Such is the manner in which Dr. Priestley provides for ‘ the honour and advantage of this country,’ and such are the claims which our legislature is required to satisfy !

(H) The offer of their abilities, integrity, and learning, and all that may be intended by their ‘ *quick-sighted*’ talents for the service of the state will be sufficiently noticed by a short extract from Swift : ‘ Their zeal (says he) is commendable : and when employments go a begging for want of hands, they shall be sure to have the refusal : only upon condition that they will not pretend to them upon maxims which equally include Atheists, Jews, Turks, Infidels and Heretics, or, which is still more dangerous, even Papists themselves.’ —See Swift’s letter from a member of Parliament in Ireland, &c.

(I) ‘ Whoever writeth impartially upon this subject, must do it not only as a mere secular man, but as one who is altogether indifferent to any particular system of christianity. And I think in whatever country that religion predominates, there is one certain form of worship and ceremony, which is looked upon as the established ; and consequently only the Priests of that particular form are maintained at the public charge, and all civil employments are bestowed among those that comply (at least outwardly) with the same establishment. This method is strictly observed even by our neighbours the Dutch, who are confessed to allow the fullest liberty to conscience, of any christian state : and yet are never known to admit any persons into civil offices, who do not conform to the legal worship.’ See Swift’s advantages

advantages proposed by repealing the sacramental test,' see also his queries on the same subject.

(K) 'The invitation which the Dissenters have given to the Scottish nation, 'to cooperate with them in their application,' seems scarcely to be dictated by a pure attachment 'to the constitution of this 'country,' and as if 'nothing hostile' was ultimately intended, 'to 'the religious principles of the church of England.' Why should a meeting of Dissenters at Leicester take upon them to determine what may be 'injurious to the Scottish nation?' It cannot be with a view of strengthening that union which has been so long established to the satisfaction and happiness of the united kingdoms and which I trust, ever will remain unbroken! Surely the Dissenters betray their *final views indiscreetly* by an invitation of so seditious a tendency! I have been unwilling to charge their conduct, with so harsh a construction, and I would still hope that very few of them are *intentionally* seditious, but what favourable inference can be drawn from the alarm which their leaders are sounding through every part of Great Britain, about 'their common cause;' how are we to understand their voluntary contributions for the 'national meeting and for *other public uses.*'

(L) The Author having only adverted, in this limited manner, to the principal arguments which are framed by the Dissenters and to the principal grievances of which they complain, is induced to recommend to his readers the books already mentioned in these notes, and some late Pamphlets which have been published on the subject, particularly from the Olarendon press in Oxford.

Copy from the Birmingham Gazette of Jan. 18, 1790.

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS.

AT a meeting of the deputies of protestant dissenters of the three denominations within the midland district, comprehending the following counties, viz. Derby, Nottingham, Lincoln, Warwick, Worcester, Salop, and Stafford, held at Leicester, on Wednesday, the 12th of January, 1790, in concert with the associated counties of Leicester and Rutland.

SAMUEL SHORE, Esq: in the chair.

The Rev. Mr. Parsons was received as deputy from the committee, of Yorkshire, when it was resolved, with only one dissenting voice in one resolution.

I. That it is not the province of the civil magistrate to direct or to interfere with the religious opinions, or practices of any members of the state, provided their conduct be not injurious to others.

II. That all the subjects of the state, conducting themselves in an equally peaceable manner, are equally entitled, not only to protection in the possession of their civil rights, but also to any civil honours, or emoluments which are accessible to other subjects, without

out any regard to their religious opinions or practices.

III. Desiring nothing for ourselves but the same equal and liberal treatment, to which we think all other persons, in a similar situation, are equally intitled, it is our earnest wish that an equal participation in all civil privileges may be obtained for dissenters of every description, to whom nothing can be objected besides their religious opinions, or practices, and who can give that security for their civil allegiance, which the state ought to require.

IV. That the protestant dissenters of this country, have always had reason to complain of unjust treatment, in being disqualified to hold offices of civil trust or power, though their behaviour has ever been peaceable, and loyal, and though they can even boast peculiar merit, as friends to the present government.

V. That it becomes dissenters, as men feeling their own disgraceful situation, and the opprobrium which that reflects upon their country, to adopt every constitutional method, of procuring the redress of their grievances, and thus retrieve the honour of the nation,

VI. A:

VI. As one principal ground of our abhorrence of the test laws, is the prostitution of religion to interested and secular views, and as these laws therefore ought to be equally abhorred by every friend of pure religion; we invite every conscientious fellow-subject of the established church to concur with us, assuring them that in this proceeding we sympathize with them, and we wish them to sympathize with us, and each contribute to do away this reproach and profanation of our common religion. But if it should be deemed more honourable to themselves to act apart from us, we invite them as a separate body to come forward, and in some decided manner bear their testimony to a cause, which does equal honour to both.

VII. As the test act is equally injurious to the Scottish nation, and as they are equally interested in its repeal, they are invited to cooperate with us in application to the legislature for the recovery of our common rights.

VIII. That with the same decided tone, with which we assert our rights as men and christians, and protest against all interference of the magistrate in the proper cause of religion, we repel with scorn, the imputation of all meaner and baser views. We have

no latent ambition under the mask of religion. We are as superior to hypocrisy as we are to fear. We aspire not to one emolument or honour of the church. In our civil capacity we vow as pure a loyalty, as generous and ardent an affection, as liberal exertions, and as well informed, and well principled an attachment to the constitution of our country, as its most favoured and honoured subject can pretend to.—Our reverence of Britain, her government and laws is only in subordination to our reverence of God and of human nature.

IX. That though the particular grievance of the corporation and test acts, has been the means of convening us, as part of the body of dissenters; we think it our duty to use our utmost endeavours to procure the repeal of all penal statutes in matters of religion, as this is clearly comprehended within our just rights, and are persuaded that in this we meditate nothing new, as religious liberty ever will and must be defective, while one such penal law is suffered to exist.

X. That in contending for our civil rights, we mean nothing hostile to the religious principles of the church of England, or to any religious principles whatever, holding it as a maxim, that nothing of this nature is within the province of the civil magistrate; we therefore

fore will not be considered as responsible for whatever any individual, belonging to any part of the body of dissenters may publish for or against any religious tenets; we consider it as every man's right to do whatever under the influence of a love of truth he may think proper in that respect: but publications, not expressly authorized by any body of men, should not be imputed to that body.

XI. That a permanent mode of collecting the sense and uniting the efforts of the whole body of dissenters of every denomination so that they may have their representatives to meet in London or else-where, and make proper application to the legislature as circumstances may require, appears to be a measure well calculated to promote the desirable end above-mentioned.

XII. That a number of delegates shall be nominated to represent the dissenters within this district in the national meeting now in contemplation, whose delegation shall continue untill a **future** district meeting shall proceed to a re-election.

XIII. That a committee of the district be now appointed, and also a secretary to whom all letters, intended for the district committee are to be addressed, through whom the correspondence of that committee shall be conducted,

ed, and who shall be impowered to summon the committee at any time, of which he shall also be chairman.

XIV. That the nomination of theⁿ delegates, and accommodating both the number and appointment of them to the several counties within this district be left to the committee of the separate associations, in concurrence with the committee of the district.

That the committee be desired to embrace the earliest opportunity of corresponding with other bodies of dissenters, who have not yet signified their concurrence in the appointment of a national meeting, and use every wise measure to induce all to concur therein.

XV. That this committee be impowered to fill up any vacancies that may happen in the delegation of the national meeting.

XVI. That the committee be desired to enter immediately on a correspondence with other established committees of dissenters, and particularly with the committee of delegates in London, with respect to the time in which it may be most expedient that the national meeting shall be held, and that they have especially in view the appointing a time which shall coincide with the motion in Parliament in

their favor, so as to act with the most efficiency, and that the residence of the deputies may not be unnecessarily prolonged.

XVII. That the committee be directed to invite the attention of the dissenters, in Wales to the cause in which we are engaged, and to consider of some easy and practical means whereby they may be enabled to co-operate with us.

XVIII. That a fund shall be established from the voluntary contributions of the congregations within this district, for defraying the expence of their attending the national meeting, and for other public uses; and that the deputies present may be desired to solicit their respective congregations for such proportions of it as they shall deem expedient, and remit the same, be it more or less, to the treasurer who may now be chosen for this district.

XIX. That WILLIAM RUSSEL, Esq: of Birmingham, be appointed treasurer, and also secretary of the district.

XX. It is recommended to the different bodies of the dissenters in the kingdom, and especially to their chairmen, that they be particularly attentive to the communication of their respective proceedings, and of every thing interesting to the common cause.

XXI. That

XXI. That it be recommended to the Rev. George Walker to draw up a statement of the prosecution now impending at Nottingham against the mayor and the two sheriffs on the ground of the test act, and that this statement be circulated through the kingdom.

XXII. That a list be collected and printed of the various bodies of Dissenters who have already taken a decided part in the common cause, together with the names of their chairmen.

XXIII. That the thanks of this meeting be transmitted, by the chairman, to all those members of the house of commons, who in the last sessions of parliament, voted for the repeal of the corporation and test acts; to Henry Beaufoy, Esq. who introduced the motion, and to the other gentlemen who exerted themselves in pleading for it;—among these we wish that particular attention be given to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox, on account of his singularly generous conduct, in taking the part of men, who on a late occasion were considered as hostile to his political measures, and of his postponing every personal consideration, to the higher claims of truth and right: in which we adopt not any party views, but reserving our right to judge of any constitutional question, and to act accordingly,
we

we declare ourselves unconnected with any Party in the state.

XXIV. That it be recommended to the committees of the different associated bodies of dissenters to apply to every member of the house of commons, and to every peer of the realm within the extent of their association, for their support of the intended application to the Legislature.

XXV. That the special thanks of this meeting be given to Sir Egerton Leigh, baronet, to Thomas Arnold M. D. and other gentlemen of the established religion, who with a magnanimity that does honour to themselves, and may be a happy example to others, have given to this meeting the countenance of their presence and concurrence.

XXVI. That the thanks of this meeting be given to William Ruffel, Esquire, and the Rev. George Walker.

XXVII. That Samuel Shore, Esq; jun. be respectfully thanked by this meeting for his acceptance of the chair, and for his agreeable acquiescence in the spirit of the meeting.

XXVIII. That the Proceedings of the meeting be published in every public paper within the district, and also in such of the London papers, as the committee shall direct.

SAMUEL SHORE, Chairman.



