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WILTSHIRE MEETING

ON THE

**Roman Catholic Claims;**

HELD AT

THE DEVIZES,

*Jan. 27th, 1813:*

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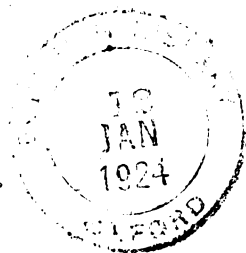
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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following account of the late meeting in Wiltshire is published in consequence of various animadversions on what passed on that occasion. As the circumstances which led to the requisition, have been as much misrepresented as what occurred at the meeting, it may be useful to state the facts. At the Quarter Sessions held at the Devizes in January last, several gentlemen and magistrates expressed a wish to sign a requisition to the sheriff for calling a meeting to consider of a petition *against* the

Roman Catholic claims. To this plan others objected, either from a difference of opinion on the main subject, or from a sense of the impropriety of expressing any decided judgment in a requisition for a meeting to deliberate. The requisition was consequently drawn up to take into consideration the Catholic claims. It originated, however entirely, and it was chiefly signed by persons hostile to the claims. Those who signed the requisition attended the meeting, and most of them supported the resolution of petitioning Parliament against all alterations whatever in the laws relating to Roman Catholics, which was negatived by a large majority of freeholders.

ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
**WILTSHIRE MEETING,**  
&c.

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**A** NUMEROUS and most respectable meeting of the freeholders of the County of Wilts was held in the Town Hall of Devizes, on Wednesday the 27th ult., for the purpose of considering the Catholic claims. The Duke of Somerset, the Marquis of Lansdown, Lord Viscount Andover, Lord Holland, Mr. Long, Mr. Methuen, (members for the county) Sir J. Poore Methuen, Mr. Humphries, Mr. Estcourt, sen. Mr. Estcourt, and Mr. Joshua Smith, (the two members for Devizes) Mr. Robert Gordon, M. P. Mr. A. Baring, M. P. Mr. N. Calley, M. P. the Rev. Mr. Ogle, the Rev. Mr. Bowles, the Rev. Mr. Goddard, and many other gentlemen of rank and property were present.

*Colonel Penruddock* stated to the Meeting, that he took the chair in the absence of the High Sheriff, from whom he had a letter of excuse for his non-attendance on account of indisposition. The present meeting had been called on the requisition of several gentlemen of the county, most of whom were then pre-



purpose of taking the Catholic consideration.

*the member for Cricklade, then*  
“ That as he was at the head of  
it became necessary for him to  
remarks to the meeting. He  
empt to enter into the subject of  
claims, in so far as related to the  
e Catholics themselves, for that  
had never studied. The only  
he considered of importance to  
present, was the safety of the  
state of this country. If the  
ld not shew them that the con-  
ir claims would be beneficial to  
ion, and would promote the  
unity of the country; or if it  
shewn by them that what they  
ould not be detrimental to the  
he country, the legislature was  
d to yield a concession to their  
ertaining such sentiments, he  
was necessary for the other party  
what they asked would not be  
the constitution. He, for his  
s satisfied with the constitution  
t stood. The Catholics were not  
e-fourth of the population of the  
it was therefore too much in this  
to expect that any alterations  
eed to by which the rest of the  
ht be endangered. He had a  
med in conformity with these  
his pocket, which he should read  
g.—



“ That an address be presented to his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, and petitions to both Houses of Parliament, praying that no alterations whatever, under the present circumstances, might be made in the laws which relate to the Roman Catholics.”

Having moved this resolution,

*Mr. Harding* rose to second it. “ Every Protestant ought now to come forward in support of the privileges which we inherited from our ancestors, and which we were bound to hand down to our posterity unimpaired. If the Catholics were to be admitted to the privileges of the constitution, the laws would be impaired, and the constitution, as established at the Revolution, departed from. The King was by law bound to be a Protestant. Since the union with Ireland, the admitting Catholics to the possession of the elective franchise, had operated very strongly in favour of their power and influence. If they were next to be admitted into the legislature, there was no saying what consequences might be the result. If, however, concession of their claims was to be yielded, for God’s sake let it go hand in hand with security, and let not the boon, on any account, precede the security. It had been urged in the House of Commons, that their table was not loaded with petitions against the Catholics; but this was not then necessary, as the country depended on the wisdom of their representatives. It behoved, however, the country now to stand forward in defence of that constitution, which had been cemented by the blood of Englishmen,

and which had been proved by the experience of ages, to be the best safeguard of our national prosperity."

*Lord Andover* said, "When he rose to oppose the resolutions against the claims of the Catholics, he did so because that resolution was prejudging the question, which ought to be left to the wisdom and justice of Parliament. He would submit a few observations on the speeches of the mover and seconder of the resolution. These speeches seemed to be at direct variance with one another. The one represented the Catholics as a poor despicable body; and the other as so powerful, that if their claims were granted the constitution might possibly be overturned.—Little did he expect, that in this age of liberality, in the nineteenth century, sentiments would have been brought forward, more suitable to the eleventh century, and which would even have disgraced the reign of Queen Anne. The army and navy were composed in a great measure of Catholics; and would it be pretended that those who were fighting the country's battles abroad, would endeavour to destroy its constitution at home?—Would they put arms into the hands of those Catholics who were poor and illiterate, and refuse the privileges of the constitution to those men who were bound by every tie to support it, and who had the greatest interest in the well being and prosperity of their country? He had one observation to make on the speech of the seconder of the resolution. When he talked of the glorious Revolution of 1688, was he aware that no mo-

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narch was more willing than William III. to extend to the Catholics the privileges of the constitution? It was his wish that every portion of British subjects should be admitted to a share of that constitution. The Catholics, he thought, should not be exposed to the obloquy which the resolution cast upon them, because their conduct had been always most temperate and loyal. Such, he trusted, would that conduct always remain. The day was not far distant when they must be put into possession of the privileges of the constitution; and if it should be thought necessary that additional securities ought to be demanded from them, it was the business of the legislature to determine what those securities ought to be. The present motion, however, completely prejudged the question, which he thought might be safely left to the wisdom of Parliament; and on that ground he wished to move the following address to Parliament by way of amendment:—

“ To the Honorable the House of Commons, in Parliament assembled.

“ The humble Petition of the undersigned, inhabitants of the county of Wilts, sheweth:—

“ That your petitioners have observed that the House of Commons did, in June last, resolve, that it would, early in next session, take into its consideration the state of the laws affecting the Roman Catholic subjects of Great Britain and Ireland, with a view to a final and conciliatory adjustment; that perceiving that attempts have been made to convey opinions

hostile to any relaxation of the disqualifying laws by which Roman Catholics are excluded from Parliament and office, and thereby to impress upon your honorable House, that the sense of the Protestant inhabitants of this country is generally inimical to any consideration whatever of this important question,—your petitioners humbly beg leave to lay their sentiments before your honorable House.

“They rely implicitly on the vigilance of Parliament in discovering, and on its wisdom in removing all causes of discontent and dissatisfaction; they are convinced that the deliberative faculties of the legislature are fully adequate to devise such comprehensive settlement of this interesting subject, as may be equally conducive to the peace of the United Kingdom, and the interests of the established Church; which cannot be more effectually promoted than by conciliating the affections of all classes of his Majesty’s subjects, and providing for the general safety of the empire, by strengthening the attachment of all its inhabitants, of whatever persuasion, to its constitution and government.”

*The Rev. Richard Goddard*, son of the late member for Wiltshire, seconded this motion.

An interval of some minutes having elapsed, and the chairman having proceeded to put the question,

*The Marquis of Lansdowne* rose.—“He had waited till the last moment, when the Chairman called on the Meeting to come to a decision on the question on which they were unexpectedly convened that day, that he

might hear the grounds on which the resolution was recommended, which had been moved on the other side. He had waited till the very last moment, because he wished to hear something more than he had yet heard, and because he could not be persuaded, that on the arguments which had been stated, and by them alone, the meeting could possibly come to a resolution, that a petition should be presented to Parliament, hostile to any alteration whatever in the laws relating to the Roman Catholics. He had expected to hear from those who originated the resolution, a distinct statement and explanation of the dangers to be apprehended—he did not say from the Catholics, but from the legislature allowing themselves to take the subject into their consideration: For, let it be considered that it now appeared from the resolution which had been proposed, that they had been called to meet there that day, for the purpose of interposing to prevent the House of Commons from doing, what in the course of the last session of the late Parliament, they had pledged themselves to do; and that the House of Commons had done it avowedly upon the ground, that this step was necessary for the defence of the country, and for the union of all hearts in the great cause in which we are all engaged. By such a step they took upon them to say, that the House of Commons had judged wrong—that what the House meant to do in the business they really knew not—that what would be the result of their judgment they had no means of ascertaining: but that nothing which the House of

Commons could possibly do would they agree to. This, he contended, was the only view in which the petition could be brought forward; for the petition must distinctly convey their opinion, that Parliament was not able, in any way whatever, to effect any thing beneficial, improve any thing defective, or guard against any thing dangerous, in taking the claims of the Catholics into consideration. After listening to the speeches of the mover and seconder of the resolution, he confessed he should have supposed that we were in a state of the world in which nothing was to be apprehended from foreign enemies, but every thing from our own subjects. He, however, was not ashamed to avow that, in his opinion, every thing fatal and threatening was to be apprehended from our enemies abroad, and every thing good was to be looked for from the establishment of harmony and union at home, from improved confidence, and increased co-operation between all classes of his Majesty's subjects. These gentlemen, however, were ready to pronounce, that those persons whom the country admitted into the army and navy, and who were gallantly fighting our battles, not only should not be admitted into the privileges of the constitution; but that a Protestant House of Commons should not safely be allowed to deliberate whether they ought so to be admitted or not. He called upon any gentleman who entertained such an opinion, to shew wherein the danger lay which they apprehended. The mover of the resolution had told them, that he declined making any

such statement—that he meant to leave to those who opposed the resolution to show, whether it would be safe or beneficial to grant the claims of the Catholics; and that he thought it was quite unnecessary for him to show any reason for the opinion he entertained, the mere existence of the exclusion being, as he contended, a sufficient argument in its favor. This was a doctrine which would apply to every temporary law whatever, which would make the crimes and follies of one century, sow division and discontent in the next when they had ceased to exist;—and draw an eternal line of separation between persons whom common ties and common interests must ultimately blend together, when civil disabilities no longer reminded them to suspect and distrust each other. But he would ask any Englishman to lay his hand to his heart and say, if he thought that any disabilities ought, in any case, to be imposed upon any class of his fellow subjects without its being shown that these disabilities are necessary? This was not an argument on which an Englishman ought to go. The grounds of the exclusion ought, in all cases, to be apparent. He did not desire them to appeal to authority with a view to decide this question, though great authorities might be produced in favor of the Catholic claims. The greatest statesmen, and he would confine himself, for obvious reasons, to those who were now no more, were advocates for concession to the Catholics. Mr. Pitt, Mr. Fox, and Mr. Burke, persons who differed in opinion upon every other political

question, opposed to each other in every political interest, were compelled by a sense of duty and of principle to agree in their views of this subject, that it was necessary to do something in regard to those laws which affected the Roman Catholics. He did not mean to state to them, that because these great men were agreed in this opinion, they were therefore to be precluded from all discussion on the subject; but, at least it was a strong reason for them to be cautious, and weigh well what opinions they entertained, before they determined to differ from these statesmen. The gentlemen who moved and seconded the resolution, ought to show them why they differ from Mr. Pitt, from Mr. Burke, and Mr. Fox. He asked them to show what the danger was which they apprehended? For his own part he knew no danger which could follow from admitting any class of persons into the possession of privileges in the State, but what resulted either from their known professions or their known practice, either from the clearest evidence of their entertaining sentiments hostile to the state, or of their manifesting such hostility by their actions. With respect to their professions, the Catholics had taken every oath which had been prescribed to them, renouncing all doctrines which could in any wise be considered inimical to the safety of the state. He had copies of these oaths in his pocket, which, if the meeting was desirable, he would read to them. (*General cry of read.*) He knew they wished to be informed, and not to set their names hastily to any petition which might be



presented to them; but to form a deliberate judgment, after a full and dispassionate enquiry, like Englishmen.---These oaths, which he was going to state were prescribed to be taken by every Catholic, and he knew no man, he had heard of no man who desired that any Catholic should be admitted to privileges without taking them. (*Here the noble Marquis read the oaths.*)

“ I A. B. do sincerely promise and swear,  
 “ That I will be faithful, and bear true alle-  
 “ giance to His Majesty King George the  
 “ Third, and him will defend to the utmost  
 “ of my power against all conspiracies and at-  
 “ tempts whatever that shall be made against  
 “ his person, crown, or dignity; and I will  
 “ do my utmost endeavour to disclose and  
 “ make known to His Majesty, his heirs and  
 “ successors, all treasons and traitorous con-  
 “ spiracies which may be formed against him  
 “ or them: And I do faithfully promise to  
 “ maintain, support, and defend, to the ut-  
 “ most of my power, the succession of the  
 “ crown; which succession, by an Act, inti-  
 “ tuled, *An Act for the further Limitation of*  
 “ *the Crown, and better securing the Rights*  
 “ *and Liberties of the Subject,* is, and stands  
 “ limited to the Princess Sophia Electress and  
 “ Duchess Dowager of Hanover, and the  
 “ heirs of her body, being Protestants; here-  
 “ by utterly renouncing and abjuring any  
 “ obedience or allegiance unto any other per-  
 “ son claiming or pretending a right to the  
 “ crown of these realms: And I do swear, that

“ I do reject and detest, as an unchristian and  
 “ impious position, that it is lawful to murder  
 “ or destroy any person or persons whatsoever,  
 “ for or under pretence of their being heretics  
 “ or infidels; and also that unchristian and  
 “ impious principle, that faith is not to be  
 “ kept with heretics or infidels: And I fur-  
 “ ther declare, That it is not an article of my  
 “ faith, and that I do renounce, reject, and  
 “ abjure the opinion, that princes excommu-  
 “ nicated by the Pope and Council, or any  
 “ authority of the See of Rome, or by any  
 “ authority whatsoever, may be deposed or  
 “ murdered by their subjects, or any person  
 “ whatsoever: And I do promise, that I will  
 “ not hold, maintain, or abet any such opi-  
 “ nion, or any other opinions contrary to what  
 “ is expressed in this declaration: And I do  
 “ declare, That I do not believe that *the Pope*  
 “ *of Rome*, or any other foreign prince, pre-  
 “ late, state, or potentate, *hath, or ought to*  
 “ *have, any temporal or civil jurisdiction,*  
 “ *power, superiority, or pre-eminence, direct-*  
 “ *ly or indirectly, within this realm:* And I  
 “ do solemnly, in the presence of God,  
 “ profess, testify and declare, that I do make  
 “ this declaration, and every part thereof, in  
 “ the plain and ordinary sense of the words of  
 “ this oath, without any evasion, equivocation,  
 “ or mental reservation whatever; and with-  
 “ out any dispensation already granted by the  
 “ Pope, or any authority of the See of Rome,  
 “ or any person whatever; and without think-  
 “ ing that I am or can be acquitted before  
 “ God or man, or absolved of this declaration,

“ or any part thereof, although the Pope or  
 “ any other person or authority whatsoever  
 “ shall dispense with or annul the same, or  
 “ declare that it was null or void.\*

“ So help me God.”

The Marquis begged the gentlemen to pay particular attention to the next oath he should read, and to bear in mind that Every Irish Roman Catholick actually took it.

“ I, *A. B.* do swear, that I do abjure, condemn, and detest, as unchristian and impious, the principle that it is lawful to murder, destroy, or any ways injure any person whatsoever, for or under the pretence of being a heretic; and I do declare solemnly before God, that I believe that no act in itself unjust, immoral, or wicked, can ever be justified or excused by or under pretence or colour that it was done either for the good of the church, or in obedience to any ecclesiastical power whatsoever. I also declare, that it is *not* an article of the Catholic Faith, neither am I thereby required to believe or profess, that the Pope is infallible, or that I am bound to obey any order in its own nature immoral, though the Pope, or any ecclesiastical power, should issue or direct such order; but, on the contrary, I hold that it would be sinful in me to pay any respect or obedience thereto: I further declare, that I do not believe that any sin whatsoever commit-

\* Prescribed by the 31st of the King, and taken by all English Catholics.

"ted by me can be forgiven at the mere will  
 "of any Pope, or of any priest, or of any  
 "person or persons whatsoever; but that sin-  
 "cere sorrow for past sins, a firm and sincere  
 "resolution to avoid future guilt, and to  
 "atone to God, are previous and indispensa-  
 "ble requisites to establish a well-founded  
 "expectation of forgiveness; and that any  
 "person who receives absolution, without  
 "these previous requisites, so far from ob-  
 "taining thereby any remission of his sins,  
 "incurs the additional guilt of violating a sa-  
 "crament. And I do swear, that *I will de-*  
 "*fend, to the utmost of my power, the settle-*  
 "*ment and arrangement of property in this*  
 "*country, as established by the laws now in*  
 "*being: I do hereby disclaim, disavow, and*  
 "*solemnly abjure, any intention to subvert the*  
 "*present church establishment; for the pur-*  
 "*pose of substituting a Catholic establishment*  
 "*in its stead; And I do solemnly swear, that*  
 "*I will not exercise any privilege to which I*  
 "*am or may become intitled, to disturb and*  
 "*weaken the Protestant religion and Protest-*  
 "*ant government in this kingdom.\**

"So help me God."

"And now he would appeal to their own  
 hearts and consciences, if they could possibly  
 devise terms more clear and explicit than those  
 in which these oaths were conveyed? And  
 no man ever dreamt of their admittance to pow-  
 er without them. No man, he trusted, would

\* Prescribed by the 33d Irish statute of the King, and taken by all Irish Roman Catholics.

get up and say, these oaths were no security, because they were the oaths which the legislature themselves thought proper to prescribe. If they said they would not believe the Catholics on oath, why impose any oath on them at all? What, in such a view, was to prevent the Catholics from getting possession of the House of Commons to-morrow. . . . Where is the security on which you rely for excluding any person of any description whatever from public employment? Upon what system has your legislature, which requires oaths at every step, proceeded? If he felt no conscientious scruples as to the nature of an oath, every Catholic peer might enter the House of Lords, every Catholic commoner might enter the House of Commons; every other Catholic might hold what commission, and administer what office he chose, without asking their permission; but was it fair, was it just, when you prescribed these oaths, when they had taken them, acted upon them for twenty years, to turn round upon them, and, for want of better argument, charge them with the very opinion they had so solemnly renounced? He had said, that there were two things to be looked to in regard to the Catholics—their professions and their practice. He had adverted to their professions; now what was their practice? He would ask, if those who had taken these oaths were ever known to have betrayed them? They had fought valiantly in the fleets and armies of their country; and he would ask, if any of them had violated the oaths which hundreds of thousands of them had taken? He knew it

might be said, that that mighty potentate the Pope of Rome would, some time or other, tell them to violate their oath. And who was that mighty potentate, the Pope of Rome? We live in times in which great revolutions have taken place, in which whole monarchies have been pulled down, constitutions given way, and in which all the mightiest passions of men have been engaged; and he would ask if there was a single instance of this or any other pope having had the slightest influence in producing or modifying any of the changes which have taken place? If he had ever procured a single individual to desert the allegiance which he owed to his sovereign, or given to any sovereign power to control his people? But where was the Pope now? He wondered if the gentleman who moved the resolution, and who seemed to entertain such a dread of him, knew where he was. The gentleman was so afraid of him, that he dared to say he knew. He had himself heard—but he was not willing to tell the meeting till the gentleman should say if he knew—he himself had accidentally heard from an eye-witness, the manner in which Bonaparte had possessed himself of the person of this mighty potentate. He was seized in the daytime in the midst of his own palace by a few soldiers—having received a previous intimation of what was intended, he issued a proclamation from his palace, calling upon all good Catholics to assist him; but nobody, for all that, would help him. In Italy, which they all knew was a Catholic country, and the very centre of Catholicism—through the Ecclesi-

astical States, the inhabitants of which were all Catholics—through Florence, the inhabitants of which were likewise all Catholics—was he conveyed—by whom? Perhaps by a mighty army—by eight dragoons, headed by one officer—and by these eight dragoons was he conveyed to France—and he could not find eight other persons, good Catholics, willing to rise to his assistance. But, perhaps, there were persons at the meeting who thought that the Pope had forborne to exercise his all-powerful influence for a while in France, Italy, and Spain, that he might lie concealed, and fall by surprise on the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury—he meant to speak with the respect which he sincerely entertained for that and similar other establishments of the church to which he belonged. He wished that Dr. Douglas, one of the enlightened dignitaries of that chapter, could have been present. He would have told them that the church was only in danger from the indiscreet zeal of her ministers.

“ They had all been witnesses of the glorious conflicts which had taken place in the course of the last summer; how the tide of invasion had rolled back upon its authors, and by means of what, that real enemy of our church and state, Bonaparte, had been driven back by the great country which he had dared to invade. It was well known that there existed in Russia a Greek church, in opposition to the church of Rome; but so far was the Emperor, who was at the head of that church, or the bishops and dignitaries of it, afraid of putting arms



into the hands of Catholics, that we find Count Wittgenstein, a Catholic, at the head of one of his armies. We also find a Protestant minister of war in that country: and that all Catholics and Protestants are employed by the state, who swear allegiance to the Emperor of Russia. He thought the church of England sufficiently strong not to stand in need of any exclusion to support it, which the church of Russia disdained. He knew that the churches of England and Russia were equally strong to suffer arms to be put into the hands of all religious denominations, without having any thing to apprehend. But would the gentleman who moved the resolution, and those who supported him, had they been Russians, addressed the Emperor at the commencement of this campaign, not to express their confidence in the loyalty and exertions of their fellow subjects—but to tell him they had discovered some of his ministers and generals did not belong to the established Greek church—that it was true he had a General Count Wittgenstein, who was the best general in his army; but let him be dismissed for being a Catholic;—that he had a minister who had organized that army, which had driven the invaders from the Russian territory; but let him be dismissed, because of his being a Protestant? Would this have been a course which it would have been advantageous for Russia to adopt?

“ Before concluding, he would yet trouble them with a few words. He was not an advocate for the Catholics—he disapproved their reli-



gion, and disliked its doctrines ; but he knew that no religion was ever yet put down by exclusion. The way to put down that and every species of error was to instruct and to facilitate instruction. He admired, therefore, an institution, which he was glad to see introduced into this country, the Auxiliary Society for the Distribution of Bibles. Let them be assured that the spirit of light and the spirit of darkness never walked together—that exclusion which deprives men of every incentive to exertion and instruction—which requires men to be ambitious of attaining it for their own advancement, are instruments which cannot be employed by the same hand. The greatest step towards enlightening the Catholics, was bringing them forward into civil life ; and let it be well observed that in proportion as the Catholics in other countries had been enlightened, in the same proportion the Pope of Rome had lost allegiance ; and it was in countries where civil incapacities prevailed, that the Pope of Rome now possessed most power.

“ The gentleman who proposed the resolution wished to commit them ; the noble Lord who moved the address, wished them merely to leave the consideration of the subject to Parliament, under the persuasion that, by so doing alone, a conclusion might be come to, safe to all the existing establishments in this country ; and which, at the same time, would neither impair the military strength of the state, nor disturb the civil harmony which ought to exist among all classes, on which our safety de-



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pended in the present, which was the mightiest struggle in which the country was ever engaged."

*Mr. Estcourt*, one of the members for *Devizes*, said, "He could not possibly suffer the call from the noble Marquis to pass without his stating the apprehensions which he entertained from admitting the Catholics to power. He did not mean to enter at length into the question—he hoped they would excuse him. He saw arranged against him a phalanx of talents. In one word, the fear which he had was the supremacy of the Pope. He did not feel encouraged to go on by the sort of reception which he had met with. He was not used to public speaking. It might be said this danger was absurd and futile. He would like to ask the noble Marquis what dragoons had the Pope in their custody? Were they not the dragoons of Bonaparte? And was not the Pope now in the custody of Bonaparte. He did not fear the Pope, but that man who had the custody of the Pope. He was an old enough member of parliament to remember when the veto was brought forward, which was afterwards objected to by the Catholic bishops. Having stated these things, he thought he had answered the call of the noble Marquis. When they could shew him that the Pope was not under the custody of Bonaparte, then it would be time to make the concessions to the Catholics; but so long as they would not agree to the veto, and not let the King be at the head of their church, so long he thought there were fair grounds of apprehension from concession.

That was the danger which he dreaded. The noble Lord who moved the address, said the Catholics had been always temperate and prudent; but that the meetings which had been held at Dublin in the course of last summer were of a very different description, would be admitted, he believed, even by gentlemen of the party of the noble Lord himself."

*Lord Holland* said, "That not having resided in the county, and consequently not being acquainted with many of the gentlemen present, he had hesitated before he ventured to address the meeting; but as a native of Wiltshire, and a landholder in it, he hoped he might be excused for saying a few words on the question upon which they had that day been convened; they should be few: for after the luminous, full, and convincing speech of the noble Marquis, it could not be necessary to say much—he wished, however, to make some observations on what had fallen from the honourable gentleman who spoke last, and he thought he could prove that if that gentleman's vote was to be consistent with his view of the question, it must be against the resolution he had risen to support—the fact was, the fears that gentleman expressed, which he should examine presently, were confined to one point; whereas the laws against the Catholics were directed to others, and that gentleman could not therefore consistently vote against any alteration of laws which guarded against fears of which he had no apprehension—that honourable gentleman was however a fair arguer; the fairest he had heard in or out

of parliament; for he avowedly and distinctly said, that it was not the power, the army, or the ambition of Bonaparte which he feared, but it was the helpless old man of whom we had this day heard so much—the Pope!

*Mr. Estcourt* explained. He appealed to the Meeting if he had not been misrepresented by the noble Lord. What he had said was, “that he was not afraid of the individual who was Pope, but because he was under the control of Bonaparte.”

*Lord Holland* resumed, “He was sorry if he had mistated *Mr. Estcourt*; he had not meant to do so, and had understood him as he now explained himself, to fear the Pope’s influence over Catholics on account of Bonaparte’s influence over the Pope: in other words, he feared Bonaparte might make a tool of this formidable old man.—Had he then just fallen under his yoke? No, he has been in his power for years, and what use has been made of him? Oh, but he supposed, that since the Pope’s captivity or dependence on France, there have been no Catholics opposed to Bonaparte? Where then had the greatest struggle with France for now near five years been maintained? He had thought it had been in Spain, in Catholic Spain, in the country the most devoted, the most bigotted to that religion on earth—and yet he had never heard that instead of troops, Bonaparte had sent papal bulls to bid the Spaniards lay down their arms and acknowledge Joseph. Nor did he believe, nor did any one believe, that Catholics as they were, the Spaniards would pay the slightest attention to

any such mandate. We have heard to-day, that in Russia, in this very campaign, in which he has met with such signal and unexampled misfortunes, he has been opposed, baffled too by Roman Catholic generals—Why, if what the gentleman feared had any reality—why should Bonaparte collect such vast armaments? why should he brave the elements, why expose himself, and his three hundred thousand men to ice, to frost, to famine, to the resentment of the Russians, and to the fury of the Cossacks? Why all this trouble, expence, and danger when he had a snug little old man in a corner who could write a card to Count Wittgenstein to disband the armies of his enemy, and lay the Russian Empire at once at his mercy? The fear was preposterous—but this question had sometimes been argued (not, however, in Parliament—no; such arguments were reserved for places where there was no opportunity of immediate reply, for anonymous hand-bills, pamphlets; he feared too occasionally sermons and even charges;) it had been argued as if it was a question whether we should have a Protestant or a Catholic establishment. But even, if he were to admit, for the sake of argument, and it would be a very great and preposterous admission indeed, that all which was said against Catholics were true, yet it would be difficult to shew that when all that was now asked was granted, they would be one step nearer an establishment than they are now. He would not dwell on such an ignorant argument, because he had not that day heard it; and the gentleman who spoke last had shewn candour, fair-



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ness, and moderation, but he ought to vote against Mr. Calley's resolution, because he dreaded nothing but the supremacy of the Pope. Why then if the Catholics would renounce that supremacy, he must be satisfied—he ought to be willing to reduce the oaths to that—but though some part, a very small part of the oaths touched that part, the greater part of them related to tenets which had nothing to do with it. Lord Lansdowne had read to them the oaths Catholics actually did take; he would now read the declaration they would not sign, and the meeting would judge if the part, at least, which he read was either necessary or proper.

“ I A. B. do solemnly and sincerely, in the presence of God, profess, testify and declare that I do believe, that in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper there is not any transubstantiation of the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, at or after the consecration thereof by any person whatsoever, and that the invocation or adoration of the Virgin Mary, or any other saint, and the sacrifice of the Mass, as they are now used in the church of Rome are superstitious and idolatrous.”

Now this required them to abuse and vilify tenets which their very enemies allowed to be harmless to the state; at least and which they or their ancestors had long considered to be sacred—He (Lord H.) was no advocate for such a creed—he wondered



how Catholics could believe it, but they did—  
 and though he saw no sense in the belief of  
 transubstantiation or invocation of saints, he  
 saw no danger to king or to Parliament therein  
 —Those then, who saw danger in the poor old  
 Pope, should confine their guards to the Pope,  
 and not extend them to transubstantiation, and  
 the invocation of saints; but what did the reso-  
 lution say? It said—*no alteration whatever.*—  
 The law as it now exists, whether it meets our  
 ideas of danger or not, though it be levelled  
 against one peril when we apprehend ano-  
 ther, must remain as it is, unaltered and  
 unalterable. One gentleman says, we must  
 hand down these laws of exclusion as they  
 were established at the Revolution—why?  
 The laws about Dissenters and Catholics have  
 been altered five or six times since the Revolu-  
 tion; and in Ireland, where they are now most  
 complained of, they were not enacted till  
 years after the revolution.\* They have differed at  
 different periods and in different parts of the king-  
 dom—the legislature has rung all possible chan-  
 ges upon them—there is neither intelligible sys-  
 tem nor uniform principle in them—they differ  
 now in Ireland and England. In Ireland, Catho-  
 lics vote at elections, in England they cannot. In  
 England there is a test law, in Ireland there is  
 none. But no matter, says the resolution, there  
 must be no change, no alteration, no modification

\* The revolution was accomplished in 1688; the act of  
 Parliament by which Roman Catholics were excluded from  
 the Irish Parliament passed in 1691.—The test act was not  
 extended to Ireland till Queen Anne's reign—It was not  
 till seven or eight years after the Revolution that Catholics  
 were rendered incapable of voting at elections.



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whatever; we must petition Parliament to keep things exactly as they are, though they have expressed their opinion distinctly, that they are not in a state either reasonable or secure.

He did not wish to enter on a distinction too often insisted upon between toleration and eligibility to power—It would open a very wide field—This, however, he would say, there was no instance in history of any body of men disqualified by law from all share of political power, practically enjoying civil or religious liberty for any length of time.—The only security for the liberties of the people was a share in their government.—Religious worship might be tolerated by law, but if those who attended it were disqualified from all office, trust, or power, they never would have the means of ensuring the enjoyment of what was nominally granted to them.—Exclusions were contrary to the spirit of the British constitution, not only as it was written on parchment or recorded in public acts, but as it was engraven in the hearts of Englishmen.—What man of this free country was so base or ignorant as not to feel that no severer sentence could be pronounced upon him than this,—“whatever may be your loyalty, your\* zéal, or your abilities, you are incapable by law of serving your king or your country?”

To return to the danger apprehended from Bonaparte through the Pope, we had the experience of several years to prove it was

\* This sentiment, nearly in the same words, is to be found in the reasons of the Lords in a conference with the Commons.



groundless—He believed Bonaparte relied on his numerous resources, on his legions, on his bayonets, (entrusted by the bye without exclusion to men of all sects and religions,) more than on his influence with the Pope or the Pope's influence with any one—the fear of papal power returning seemed to him most extravagant. So strange an apprehension of remote dangers reminded him of a story which when he heard it, appeared absurd from its improbability—A man it was said was led to execution, and the rope was actually tied round his neck; yet he betrayed no symptoms of fear, bore the dreadful preparations for death with firmness and resignation, and expressed neither terror nor concern at his approaching fate—suddenly, however, to the astonishment of every one, he exclaimed, in great agitation and alarm, “Good God, there is a man in that field, don't you see him?” “Well, and what then?” “Why he is sowing hemp, the hemp will perhaps come up, and who knows if it does, but they will make a rope of it, and with that rope they may hang me.” So it was with these gentlemen, they saw no danger in discontents in Ireland, and Bonaparte in France, the real ropes round our neck, while they were wholly lost in contemplation of distant, improbable, and speculative perils. He gave the gentlemen who signed the requisition credit for the moderation of the terms in which it was conceived, and for fairness and manliness in calling a meeting, if they were disposed to petition.—He thought it, however, somewhat hard upon those who attended that call to be taunted with being prepared, being



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arrayed in a phalanx, and other expressions insinuating some advantage taken of those who moved the resolution.—Those who first moved the question had surely time to prepare the grounds of what they recommended, and to form their phalanxes in support of it—Those who called the meeting could not well censure others for attending it—as it was called, the question was which would be the safer and wiser course—to give a decided opinion on this matter, or to refer it to the wisdom of Parliament, which is pledged to consider it?—For himself he seldom disguised his opinion; and he was ready to acknowledge that it was, and long had been favourable to the Catholic claims;—but he did not for that reason wish, like the other gentlemen, to press the meeting to adopt his opinion? No; he wished them to leave the matter to Parliament, at least for the present—for the wise forms of our constitution had provided that nothing could be done in such a business in Parliament without full time occurring for the country to give its opinion thereupon. Parliament had declared that it was desirable to make an arrangement if possible—and the question which we now had to decide was, whether in this preliminary stage we should entreat Parliament not even to try to bring the matter to an amicable conclusion; or place our reliance on Parliament, for doing nothing inconsistent with our safety or impervious to our establishments.—As to the veto or other securities he saw no use in entering into such details—those, however, who thought that if a veto were secured the rest

followed of course; those who had any security, as it was called, to devise; or who thought the disabilities might be repealed at once, and the law left as sufficient security to all persons who entertained one or any of the opinions were bound to give the preference to Lord Andover's address over a resolution which declared against all alterations, and went the length of petitioning Parliament even to try to do that which they felt conducive to the peace if not necessary to the safety of the country.

Here he would have left the subject, as his noble relation near him, had mentioned the great statesmen who had been favourable to the cause, he could not help adverting to the authority of persons who had local information and whose character and situation of life secured them from the imputations very common though he believed very unjustly thrown against the active leaders of political parties he meant the Lord Lieutenants of Ireland. Since he had sat in Parliament there had been five Protestant noblemen of this country had been employed in that office by various ministers, and who had all returned convinced both of the necessity of granting the Catholic claims, and of the safety with which it might be accomplished---some of them went out with unfavourable impressions of the Catholics returned with a conviction in their favour. The first he should mention, was indeed disposed to them from the beginning he meant that excellent man Lord Fitzwilliam. Differences, however, which arose between



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government and the ministry at home, not upon the principle but upon the time and mode of concession, led to his recal. The next was Lord Camden---he would not speak of the transactions of his administration, for he wished to avoid speaking harshly of any man; but during that noble lord's viceroyalty occurred the Irish insurrection, very commonly but very falsely termed a Catholic Rebellion. He said falsely, because the documents before Parliament proved that the insurrection was conducted by a committee of five, of which four were actually protestants. But to return to Lord Camden---whatever might have been the conduct of his government to the Catholics, he had not been home two years before he resigned his office at home, because an obstacle had occurred to granting Catholics emancipation.

The Marquis of Cornwallis was a man with whom he (Lord H.) was unacquainted in private and unconnected in public—but his public actions were known, and he appeared in all of them a person of great judgment, temper, and integrity, and above all, of singular prudence; and Lord Cornwallis was so firmly persuaded, after his own experience in Ireland, of the necessity of repealing the disqualifying laws against Catholics, that he uniformly stated that the union was incomplete and useless without Catholic emancipation; and he did not confine the expression of this sentiment to his private intercourse with government, or even to his official dispatches; but in a paper which might be called a public proclamation of his opinions, (a manner of expressing them cer-



tainly very unusual for a man of his caution and moderation,) he informed the Catholic body of his sentiments in their favour, and of his reasons for retiring from the government of Ireland, and renewed his assurances to them of his adherence to their cause.—Then Lord Sidmouth became minister—he came in upon the principle of resisting the Catholic claims—he must naturally have sought for a Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who had doubts at least if not objections to granting the prayer of their petitions—he certainly selected a nobleman of great honour, excellent sense and sound judgment, one too who bore a title that was a sort of pledge of his knowledge of the laws, and attachment to the constitution of his country—This was Lord Hardwicke—he was a man eminently qualified to judge for himself without bias or predilection, or if he had any, it must have been in favour of Lord Sidmouth's opinions—but Lord Hardwicke was a man of observation and reflection, and from what he saw without interest or prejudice, he too became convinced of the necessity of Catholic emancipation. Since that time his friend and relation the Duke of Bedford had gone as Lord Lieutenant—he went indeed to Ireland with a bias in favour of liberality, toleration, and concession; but if he went with a bias, he came back with a rooted persuasion of the absolute necessity of Catholic emancipation. Now, he would ask, if great and enlightened statesmen; if Mr. Fox, with whose name he could hardly trust himself in a public assembly; if Mr. Burke, Mr. Pitt, Mr. Windham; if all the



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disinterested Protestant Noblemen, who had been employed by various administrations, had set out on their government with various opinions on this subject, had all sooner or later concurred in condemning the existing laws against Catholics as unjust and impolitic, could they be brought to suppose by the motion of the Hon. Gentleman that day, that no alteration could be effected in them without endangering the state, and subverting the establishment? Were all these authorities incapable of forming a judgment of the consequence of a political measure? or were the great names and respectable noblemen he had mentioned less interested in our constitution and establishment than ourselves? But they had yet further authority—the authority of a majority of the House of Commons who had at least expressed by their resolution that if it was practicable to do any thing, it was desirable that it should be done; they had engaged themselves to consider the subject. But the gentlemen who supported Mr. Calley's amendment must be prepared to say, that the House of Commons was wrong, either in thinking that such an adjustment, if practicable, was advantageous, or in imagining that it was possible to do any thing. Could they take upon them to say either of these things to the House of Commons? As to the conduct of the Catholics, there might be imprudent men among them. In what society were there not imprudent and even bad men? In all transactions where men were engaged, human passions would enter; but would it, for

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instance, be fair to the church of England, of which he was proud to call himself a member, to pick out some violent, intolerant and foolish expressions of some hot-headed man, and such there were, and then say, these are the opinions of the church of England? The truth was, the fanatics on both sides agreed, and the Catholic fanatic was as unfavourable to the petitions as the Protestant fanatic could be; they loved to disseminate hatred and not love, division and not union and strength. He wished to shew the same fairness to Catholics which we expected for ourselves. Now if gentlemen would for a moment put themselves in the situation of Catholics, and suppose that they had stated their grievances, and that the legislature without deciding on them, had resolved to consider them deliberately, would they think it fair for another body of people to step in and say, give this subject no consideration; do not try to reconcile those subjects to your state, but say what has been must continue: there shall be no alteration, there shall not even be a discussion on the subject. In this country there were few Catholics, and therefore here it was a matter of justice only—but in Ireland the people were Catholics, and he would ask if, in point of policy, it was prudent to be bandying this question between the people of the two countries, and pitting the zeal of one against the grievances of the other, instead of leaving the mode of satisfying both to the calm deliberation of those who represented equally the people of Ireland and England? Surely,



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surely, such an important matter should be left to Parliament. There never was a time when we stood more in need of all the exertions that could possibly be made. Let Parliament then try, at least, to unite those of every rank, of every sect, of every class of the community, the rich and the poor, the Englishman and the Irishman, the Catholic and the Protestant, the Church of England man, and the Dissenter!

*Mr. Estcourt* explained. He meant nothing offensive by the word phalanx.

*Mr. Methuen*, one of the Members for the County, begged leave to state, that he never saw the Address till it was that day brought forward by *Mr. Calley*. He had signed the Requisition, without considering it as any pledge of the conduct he might adopt. He meant to reserve his opinion till he could state it in his place in the House of Commons, as the question would there be more fully and fairly discussed. After such a blaze of eloquence as they had heard, there was but little chance of Gentlemen like himself, not used to public speaking, being heard with attention. With regard to the Pope, he had no fear of him—though he was inclined to think a veto or some security desirable; and with regard to the present discussion, he could only compare the chance which supporters of the resolution had against the noble lords, to the chance which the Pope had against Bonaparte.

*Mr. Calley* said in explanation, that the meeting had been called, not for the purpose of preventing Parliament from taking the claims of the Catholics into consideration, but



for the purpose of letting them know the sense of the country. Of the old man the Pope in Rome he was not afraid ; but if the Catholics were to be admitted to power without the veto, Bonaparte would have a strong hold through him in this country. He might then say, I will overturn the constitution of Great Britain. Why, the Protestants in the situation of the Catholics would do the very same. If he had a relation or connection, and a place or pension were at his disposal, he would let him have it in preference to any other person.

*Lord Holland* said, he did not know with what view the meeting had been called ; but it was easy to see with what view the resolution had been framed. The Hon. Gentleman (Mr. Calley), went beyond Catholics or Papists themselves, for he seemed to think the Pope could work miracles.

*Mr. Robert Gordon* wished to call the attention of the meeting to the late glorious defence of Canada, in which the Catholics and Protestants were equal participators. In that country there was no distinction between the two religions. He had lived much with Catholics, and he had relations of that persuasion ; and he could not bear to have it said that the Catholics would wish to overturn the constitution, or that Catholic gentlemen of property would wish to do that which would be the means of having their own estates taken from them. He recommended to the consideration of the meeting, the very moderate and christian address of the clergy of the diocese of Exeter. They had come forward in

the true character of Christian ministers, with healing under their wings: and so far from fanning the dying embers of persecution, they stood up as the advocates of toleration.

*The Rev. Mr. Spencer*, to prove that the opinions of the Catholics were unchanged, quoted the opinions of Dr. Troy and some other Catholic prelates. He considered the subject now under discussion as the cause of protestantism.

The Chairman proceeded then to take the sense of the meeting, first, on the resolution, and then on the amendment; and the numbers for the address constituted at least, as far as we were able to judge, three fourths of the meeting.

The Chairman having declared the sense of the meeting to be in favour of Lord Andover's amendment,

The Marquis of Lansdowne then moved that the address should be published in the Salisbury, Bath, and Cheltenham, and some of the London newspapers, and that a copy should be presented by the county members to the House of Commons, which was agreed to.

The thanks of the meeting were then unanimously voted to the Chairman, after which the meeting broke up.



