

THREE
LETTERS

Tending to demonstrate how the
Security of this Nation

Against al

Future Persecution

F O R

Religion,

Lys in the Abolishment of the Present Penal
Laws and Tests, and in the Establishment of

A NEW LAW

For Universal

Liberty of Conscience

with Allowance.

L O N D O N,

Printed, and Sold, by *Andrew Sowle*, at the *Three Keys*, in
Nags-Head-Court, in *Grace-Church-Street*, over-against
the *Conduit*, 1688.

Three
LETTERS,
&c.

The First Letter.

SIR,

UPON the receipt of your last Letter, I was, at first, a little troubled to perceiv the censorious Judgment you pass upon my Politics, in reference to the grand business of Liberty of Conscience. But after a little consideration I comforted my self. For I not onely remembred your constant favorable regard towards those of different Perswasions from yours, but I observed also, even in that very Letter, that you agree with me in this Fundamental

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damantal Principle, That *no Man ought to be Persecuted for Matters of meer Religion.* And this agreement in so great a Principle made me hope that, notwithstanding our present Difference, it would be no hard matter for you and me to agree in our particular Conclusions, and consequently in our Conduct. To procure that Agreement there is nothing requisite but *Honesty and Sense.* Let us but examin thorowly whether that Principle leads, and let us be tru to the result of our own Examinations, and the Work wil be don.

But perhaps so strict a subjection as this to the consequences of that Principle, however just and reasonable in it self, may seem unto you a little unseasonable in this Conjunction. Nay, I must acknowledg to you, that I my self also am not so much Master of my Passions, as to let Reason have always that absolute Dominion that belongs to it. The fear of being deceived, by a Party of Men who plead for Liberty, makes me sometimes doubtful in determining upon the practice of what I acknowledg to be a Duty. I am convinced that the *Interest of this Nation*, as wel as the *Laws of Christianity*, requires

quires an *Absolute, Universal, Equal, and Inviolable Liberty of Conscience.* Nothing that dos not tend to the Ruin of the Government, or to the Prejudice of the People, which is but one and the same thing, should be made the occasion of laying any Restraint upon any Man. But where I see ground to fear that the granting of this Liberty should serv onely to put a Power into their Hands that now demand it, wherby they may be able hereafter to take it away from others, truly in that case I am apt to hesitate upon the Point; or to say better, I confess that I hesitate not at al. For I would by no means that a specious hope of Christian Liberty should betray the Nation into a New Unchristian Slavery.

Thus far I am sure I agree with you. We would have *Liberty with Security of its continuance: not otherwise.* Now I intreat you to examin whether or no, in the rest, you agree with me. I ask then, If so be it can be demonstrated that the Penal Laws, and Tests too, may be taken away without exposing the Nation to any hazard of Persecution by the *Roman Catholics*; Nay, if a *far better Security* may be provided

provided against that Persecution than those present Laws and Tests do afford us; wil it not be an Act of Equity and Wisdom, as well as Christianity, in that case, to abolish them? This Security being supposed, nothing can hinder us from complying with that Design, but such Considerations as arise from the *Covetousness and Ambition* of ingrossing al Honorable and Profitable Employments unto our selvs, and those of our own Perswasion. But wil any Considerations of that Nature, when they interfere with a Public Interest and an avowed Duty, be justifiable, or even excusable, either before God or Man? I cannot doubt but your determination in that Point wil be the same with mine. Those Considerations are too fordid to be of any weight with an Honest Mind.

Your Objection, I know, in reading these Questions, wil arise from a *Diffidence* that any new Security of this nature, either wil or can be granted us. There indeed perhaps you and I may differ in our opinions. But however, to come as near as we can, I wil at present suspend my own Hopes, and concurring with your Doubts, consider onely what is our Duty, and the Duty
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of al honest Men, even in this supposed doubtful Coniuncture.

An Example in the like case, not many years ago, when the Nation was in as great a ferment as it is now, may direct us. Those that supposed there could be no other real Security, against the fears that possess them, than that *Odious Bill of Exclusion* which they promoted in Parliament, professed nevertheless their constant willingness to listen unto any Expedients that should be offered for that purpose. If they did not then comply with any of those Expedients, it was the heat of Faction that hindred them; and they have since on al occasions acknowledged their Error. Let us therfor profit by their Example. Let us imitate them in that reasonable disposition which they profess, and be careful to avoid those heats which caused their actual miscarriage.

In a word, let us, at least, *put the Thing to a Trial*. Let it be referred to the Wisdom of a Parliament to weigh the *Expedients* that may be invented or offered for our Security. Let *Moderate Men* be chosen into that Parliament; and not such as ar engaged, by along habit of Persecuting,
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to keep up the present Penal Laws, as Tools already fitted for their hands. Til we be called to that *Election-Work*, let us each of us endeavor to dispose our Selvs, dispose One Another, and as occasion offers dispose our Friends, to that *Spirit of Wisdom and Moderation* which is now so necessary. And til this Business have been weighed in Parliament, let us a little *suspend* our Judgment upon it, and have always a great care that we *obstruct not the Good we desire* by heighting any doubtful Jealoufys to an irreconcilable Extremity.

These are the Rules of my Politics, which I hope you will now look upon a little more favorably then you seemed to do in your last Letter. At present I will trouble you no further. But if what I have now said prove acceptable, I shall be very ready, upon your desire, to explain further my inmost thoughts upon any the nicest Circumstances of this great Affair. I am &c.

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The Second
LETTER.

SIR,

I Am heartily glad that my last Letter has given you any measure of Satisfaction. But I perceiv by your new Quærys, that I have engaged my self, in the close of that Letter, to a greater Task than I was aware of. It is not enough to have satisfy'd you so far as I have gon, but I must either continu to answer your new Difficultys, or else joyn with you in owning them to be unanswerable. I must either shew you the very *Expedjents* that may be contrived for securing us against any future Persecution by the *Roman Catholics*, or else acknowledg that no such thing either can or wil be don. That is a little hard. The thing may be feizable, tho I should not be able to demonstrate it. Others may know more than I can. Nay, indeed the truth

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is that I know so little, and others have already said so much upon this Subject, that, as I cannot pretend to make any new Discoverys in it, so neither am I willing to repeat just the same things that you have read elf-where: And between those two Difficulties I am something straitned in complying with what you desire. Nevertheless since I am engaged, I wil rather hazard to repeat what may have been hinted at already by others, than refuse to explain unto you my own Conceptions.

The Security we demand must be considered either as it lys naturally *in the thing it self*; I mean in the *Repeal* of al Old Penal Laws and Tests, and in the *Sanction* of a New Great Charter for Liberty of Conscience; or else as it may be fortify'd by such *Expedients* as the Wisdom of a *Parliament* may think fit to propound, and His *Majestys Goodness* may vouchsafe to grant.

But this last Consideration belongs not to my Province. It becoms not private Persons to anticipate Parliamentary Deliberations, much less to prescribe Rules unto His *Majestys Conduct*. It suffices me, in that respect, to know that

that His Majesty has been pleased, by often reiterated Promises, to assure us that he wil concur with his Parliament, in any thing that may be reasonably offered for the Establishment of such a Law of Christian Liberty as may never be broken. I am not curious to pry further into those matters, until His Majesty shal think fit in his Wisdom to disclose unto the Nation the Treasures of his Goodness. And to speak freely to you, as a Friend, I am yet the less curious about it at this time, nor any ways impatient to know more, until a Parliament may be ready to deliberate thereupon; because I know already, that there ar a sort of Men in the Nation who watch upon every occasion, with al the Arts that Malice can invent, to blast any thing that shal be offered for the advancement of this Christian Design. Leaving therefore the consideration of this *Accessional Security* that we look for, I wil now apply my self to consider onely what prospect of Security the thing it self dos *in its own Nature* afford us.

When we discourse about this Security, I suppose we both of us understand it onely with relation to the hazard that may arise from

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taking away the Tests. For as to the Penal Laws, singly considered, I think all Men that have Souls large enough (as I am sure you have) to prefer the *general Good* of their Country before the *narrow Advantages* of a Party, will agree that it is no less the Interest of this Nation to abolish them, than the Duty of all Mankind to forbear Persecution.

There is no hazard in the abolishment of those Penal Laws. Now what the hazard may be in abolishing the Tests, will be best perceived by considering the effect of their imposition. The effect, in which the Protestant Interest consists, is that the *Roman Catholics* are thereby excluded from all *Places of Public Trust*, either Civil or Military. This, I should have said, is the Intent of them. But how far the real Effect falls short of that Intent, and how far it must needs fall short thereof in the Reign of a Catholic Prince, is too evident to need any demonstration. Nevertheless, supposing that the *Roman Catholics* were indeed thereby debarred from entering into any Public Employments, What is the advantage that Protestants, or that the Nation in general, pretend to receive by their Exclusion?

tion? I know you will tell me that we have thereby our Security against that Principle of *Persecution* which we think inseparably joyned to *their Religion*. They will not be able to impose their Religion upon us, nor persecute us for not receiving it. That is the true End, and we will suppose it to be real Effect, of the Tests.

You do not pretend sure that the Exclusion of the *Roman Catholics* from such Employments is any Security to our *Civil Rights*, or to the *Fundamental Constitution* of our Government. They are English Men as well as we. The Civil Rights of English Men ought to be no less dear to them than to us. And if any malicious Surrizer should presume to imagine that His Majesty had a design to raise his own Prerogative upon the ruin of the Peoples Libertys, we have reason to believe, by many past instances, that Men of another Religion, much more numerous and powerful than the *Roman Catholics*, would be found no less ready Instruments, but far more proper ones, for the effecting of that work. The best defence that I know against those imaginary fears, and the most becoming

becoming dutiful Subjects, is to comply cheerfully with his Majesty in all things reasonable; that so an unreasonable Refusal may not force him upon new Methods, and make us feel in the end what we are perhaps too slow to conceive, that *Omnia dat qui iusta negat*.

But I return to the consideration of our being secured against Persecution by the Exclusion of the Roman Catholics from Public Employments. In very good time, that the *Church of England* now looks for such a Security! I am sure others have not been secured against it, by the public administration of Her Members. However, let us consider how it is that the Tests secure us, or how it is that they hinder them from entering into those Employments. It is not as a Wall or Barricado that confines them to a certain Inclosure, out of which they cannot move; nor is it as a Charm or Spel that, by any Magic Vertu, hinders them from acting. It is onely as a Law, which, by the penalty annexed to it, awes their Minds, and makes them fearful to transgress it. They dar not enter into Public Offices, lest they should be punished for the *Breach of that Law* which forbids them to do it.

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But, pray, Who is it that should punish them for that Offence? They know very well that in this Reign they are in no danger. That Law is now dispensed with. The onely Bridle therefore that restrains them from transgressing it, is evidently the fear of its being Revived in the Reign for the next Successor; because it is a Law whose Penalty they will be always liable unto, whensoever the Government shall think fit to exact it.

Now if this be the only Ground of their Exclusion from Public Offices, and consequently of our pretended Security; I say if it be onely the *Force of a Law* that works that effect; pray let us consider if *another Law* might not be contrived, to secure us much more effectually against Persecution, that this Exclusion of them either does or can do.

Let us therefore have a Law enacted, which, in *Abolishing* all those Penal Ones, and all the *Tests* too that are now complained of, shall *Establish a Universal and Equal Liberty of Conscience*, as a Magna Charta of Religion, with all the engaging Circumstances that the Wit of Man can invent to make it inviolable. Let that *Liberty*

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be declared to be the *Natural Right of Al Men*, and any violation thereof be therefore accounted Criminal. Let not onely every *Actual Infringement* of that Law, but every *Motion, Proposition, or Contrivance*, exprest either in Word or Deed, tending any way to the invalidating of it, be esteemed and declared an *Undermining of the Fundamental Constitution of our Government*, and accordingly to be punishable with the utmost Severitys, even as *Felony or Treason*. Let the Extent of this Law reach *al Conditions and al Degrees of Men*, Ecclesiastical, Civil and Military, from the highest Lord to the meanest Beggar. Let not *future Parliaments* themselves be exempted from the danger of infringing it; but let any Proposition tending therunto, *tho even in either House of Parliament*, be not onely reputed a Transgression thereof, but expressly declared to be the highest and worst of al Transgressions; and let no Parliamentary, or other *Priviledg* whatsoever exempt any such Offender from the severest Punishment, no more than they can do it now from that of Treason. And after al this, and what more the Wisest Heads may invent, let *The*
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King himself be humbly beseeched to suffer in it a Clause, by which, *reserving al other Rights of his Prerogative* inviolated, he may solemnly renounce the onely *Right of Dispensing with this Law, or of Pardoning any Transgressor of it in any case whatsoever*.

Supposing now that such a Law as this should be Enacted, I beseech you to consider if it do not answer the end of securing us against Persecution, infinitely better than the present Tests that exclude the *Roman Catholics* from Public Employments. It wil *secure*, in the first place, *al the Dissenting Protestants* from the present Penal Laws, which the Tests do not: And it wil indeed secure al Partys against al Persecution, in every respect far better than they do. It wil do it in a *direct manner*: Whereas they work onely by a *weak and strained Consequence*. It wil do it upon the *solid grounds of Religion, Truth and Equity*: Whereas they ar built onely upon *precarious, partial and unjust Principles*. It wil be declared to be in its own Nature *Indispensable*: Whereas they are every day *dispensed with*. It wil be Established by a more *solemn Sanction*: And it wil be enforced by more *awful and terifying Penalties*.

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These Advantages, as you see, do all appear in the simplest prospect that we can take of *the thing it self, in its own Nature*; in the *meer Abolishment*, I mean, of *the Laws of Persecution, and the Establishment of a Law of Liberty*; without the help of any further *Expedients*. That is the only thing that I proposed to my self to explain. And I cannot but now hope that even this explanation, how imperfect soever it be, will convince you that it is not so *dangerous* a Work to *abolish the Tests*, nor so *difficult* to *establish a lasting Security against Persecution*, when those Tests shall be Abolished, as some People industriously endeavor to persuade us. But I perceive that I have been already too tedious upon this Argument. Wherefore without further Application or Improvement thereof, I now refer what I have said to your Examination, and submit to your Judgment, resting always &c.

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The Third LETTER.

SIR,

Since I have had the good fortune to please you the second time, I am resolved to try it a third. I have endeavored, as you have seen, to make it appear that it is not impossible to contrive a *more Equitable and Unexceptionable Law* than the Tests, which will secure us also *infinitely better* than they do, against the danger of being *Persecuted by the Roman Catholics*. Now you answer me that this Law, tho it should be consented to, would be less Security to us against the Roman Catholics than the Tests: because by it they would be admitted into the *Legislative*, as well as *Executive*, parts of our Government; whereas by the other they are wholly excluded from both. And an *Exclusion*, say you, especially from the Legislative Power, is

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a far better Security than any *Regulation* whatsoever that can be made about their conduct in it: because, when once admitted into that capacity, there will be still reason to apprehend lest they should break thro' the Rules prescribed for their Conduct, and change even the Laws themselves at their pleasure.

This is indeed very specious. But I intreat you to consider, in the first place, That the *Exclusion* we talk of by the Tests is onely *Imaginary*, not *Real*. We please our selves with a Notion, while we are frustrated of the Thing. A *Dispensation* dissipates all that Bulwark into Dust and Aire: While on the contrary the *Regulation* I have propounded is to be *declared and made absolutely Indispensable*. Which is no inconsiderable advantage on the side that I incline to.

But this is not all. Your Objection prompts me to a further Defence of my Proposition. Nothing will serve your turn but an *Absolute Exclusion* of those that may have a mind to hurt us, from all manner of share, either Legislative or Executive, in our Government. Be it so. I am very well pleased to join Issue with you upon that Point.

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The *Hurt* we fear, and desire to fence against, is *Persecution*. Let us therefore, in God's name, exclude all *Persecuting* Papists, and Protestants too, from those Employments. But let all those that have a *Spirit of Moderation and Charity*, joined with other necessary Qualifications, be promiscuously admitted into them, whatsoever be their profession of Religion. It is not the Notion of Transubstantiation that hurts us. Why should we therefore make that the ground of an Exclusion? Let us go to the true Ground of the Matter, and do our Work at once, effectually.

In a Word: Let *this Act it self*, that we are projecting, be the *Fundamental Test* for the Admission of all Persons into all manner of Public Employments, or for their Exclusion from them. Let every *Member of both Houses of Parliament*, before they are admitted to sit there, be obliged to subscribe a *Declaration*, importing That they solemnly profess, and, in the presence of God, sincerely acknowledge the natural Equity of this Great Law; and that they in like manner promise never to infringe it, nor either directly or indirectly to promote any design of undermining or invalidating it in any manner

ner whatsoever. Let al those that shal presume to sit in either House, without having first subscribed that Declaration, be liable to the severest Penaltys that shal be annexed to the foresaid Law. And let al *future Acts* (if any such there should be) passed by a Parliament not so qualified as by this Law shal be required, be declared *Illegal and Nul*. Nay further, if it may be thought any strengthening to our Security, let also *Al other Public Officers*, as wel as the Members of Parliament, be obliged, upon their entrance into those Offices, to subscribe the same solemn Declaration, upon the hazard of the same Penalties, and of the Illegality and Nullity of al their Proceedings. Let al that Govern, or Teach, or any way Officiate in *Eccllesiastical Affaires*, either in Church or Conventicle; *Al Judges, Justices, Juries, Magistrates, Military Commanders* both by Sea and Land, with al the Inferior and Subordinate Officers depending upon any of them, from the highest to the lowest, be Al subject to the same Rule.

This is the *Test against Persecution* that we have been long since advised to, by One of the earliest and strongest Writers upon this Subject; but which

which the Nation seems not yet to have enough reflected upon. If this be not judged a sufficient security, I wish those that perceiv the defects of it would propound unto us any thing better. I shal be always for chusing the best. But however, in the mean while, I think al Men must agree that, *if it be indeed Persecution that we desire to fence against*, this is infinitely a better security in that respect than the present Penal Laws and Tests ar. And therefore, *provided this may be granted*, I cannot but yet hope that there wil appear to be among us Men Wise enough, and Honest enough, and those too, Numerous enough, to sway the Nation to consent to their abolishing.

I have said already that, upon the supposition of this Security there can be nothing but private *Ambition or Avarice* capable to raise an opposition against this generous Design of Universal Liberty. But surely no *private* Interest wil be capable to bear up long against the *general* Interest of the Nation. Now it has been often asserted by many, and demonstrated with great evidence, that those whose Interest it is to desire Liberty ar far more numerous than those that oppose it. But if in that there should at present be any mistake,

I am sure, when once this Liberty shal be established, it wil then be visibly and indisputably the Interest of al Partys to maintain it. Al the severall Interests of the Nation wil be then drawn up into one Circle, and the Extremitys wil touch each other. The *Church of England* and *Protestant Dissenters*, how opposite soever in other respects, wil therby becom inseparably cimented into one Common Caus. And, tho we should suspect the *Roman Catholics* to have contrary inclinations, yet the strength of the others Union wil oblige them, for their own Safety, to concur in promoting the general Good.

Yet for al this, I wil not stick to acknowledg that such a suspicion of an inclination to Persecute, *in any that may be uppermost*, is not altogether unreasonable. The Examples of *Persecutions* rais'd at one time or other, by *al Partys* that have had the power to do it, authorize those Fears. But for that very reason, I say, that this is *the fittest time* that ever we can expect, to settle *this Liberty in England*: because the *Power* is now in the Hands of the *weakest Party*, which is therefore least able to strain it. And if once that

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Settlement be made, the *united Interest* of al Partys in the *Advantages* it brings along with it, wil in human appearance *secure* it against the possibility of ever being shaken hereafter.

These Considerations, you see, afford a second Prospect of our Security in the establishment of a Law of Liberty; in that it wil be the Interest of al Partys to maintain it: And they afford also an Incitement to set about that Work; because of the seasonableness of the opportunity: Which things deserv exceedingly to be attended unto. But after so palpable a demonstration, as I think I have given, of that Security, in the frame of the Law it self, I have no mind now to intertain you with any thing that may appear more speculative, tho in effect it be no less solid.

My meaning in this is, that I have shown onely the *Possibility of this Security*. But whether or no it wil be just granted in the manner that I conceiv it, is what I cannot answer for. I rather hope it wil be made much better. But however, after this plain appearance of the possibility of the thing, I think I may resume what I said in my first Letter, as an Advice of some weight;

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weight; That, in this Conjunction, it is both the Duty and the Interest of the Nation to put this business to a Tryal, in a Grave and Moderate Parliament; and not by any means to make that impossible, by Faction, Jealousy, or Despair, which seems easily obtainable by a prudent Conduct.

Let this be our constant Aim, to have Liberty settled by a Law. That is the Mark that I shoot at. And I would be very loath that other Peoples Errors, or Humors, should make me miss it. We ought all to be singly intent upon our own Duty; and if we keep so, we cannot fail to know it. Which way soever we turn our Reflections, in these matters of Politics, they will always bring us back to the same Center. The General Good is the Rule and Touch-Stone, by which all must be tryed and measured. That General Good can never be attended unto, much less procured, without the General Satisfaction of all Partys; Nor that Satisfaction without this Equal and General Liberty which I have been pleading for.

Now therefore that every one may the more easily discern their own Duty, while we are in this

this evident possibility of obtaining such an equal and secure Liberty; I would have the Church of England, in the first place, Consider with how much Justice the Odium of a Self-interested and sordid Partiality, will be cast upon Her by all Men, in case She still continu to obstruct it. Let Her consider that, and be Ashamed. In the next place, If the Protestant Dissenters should suffer themselves to be fooled out of this Liberty, by the cunning of their Old Adversarys; I would have them consider how obnoxious they yet lie, even at this very hour, to the Redoubled Lashes of the same Laws under which they have so long groaned. Let Them consider that, and Tremble. And if the Roman Catholics should ever attempt to overstrain the Advantages they may receive by this Liberty, when it shall be established; I would have them Consider that in gaping for the Shadow, they will be in danger to lose the Substance. Let Them consider that, and be Wise. I have now done. I only again beg of you to pardon the tediousness of all these Considerations, and to believe me to be most sincerely and affectionately

Yours, &c.

F I N I S.