

A  
BRIEF AND IMPARTIAL ACCOUNT  
OF  
THE NATURE  
OF  
**THE PROTESTANT RELIGION;**  
ITS  
PRESENT STATE IN THE WORLD,  
ITS  
STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS,  
WITH THE WAYS AND INDICATIONS OF THE RUIN OR CONTINUANCE OF  
ITS PUBLIC NATIONAL PROFESSION.  
BY  
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THE  
STATE AND FATE  
OF THE  
PROTESTANT RELIGION.

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THE world is at this day filled with discourses about the Protestant religion, and the profession of it; and that not without cause. The public opposition that is made unto it; the designs that are managed with policy and power for its utter extirpation, and the confidence of many that they will take effect, must needs fill the minds of them whose principal interest and concerns lie in it, with many thoughts about the event. Never was there a greater cause brought on the stage for a trial. A cause wherein the glory of God is concerned above any thing at this day in the world. A cause wherein the most eminent prevailing powers of the earth are visibly engaged as unto its ruin; and whereunto all the diabolical arts of men are employed. A cause wherein those who embrace that religion, do judge that not only their lives, but the eternal welfare of them and their posterity is inevitably concerned. This cannot but fill the minds of all men with various conjectures about the issue of these things, according as their interest works in them by hopes and fears. Some of them therefore do endeavour by their counsels and other ways for the preservation and continuance of this Protestant religion amongst ourselves, according as they have an accession unto public affairs; and some whose lot is cast into a private capacity, do engage faith and prayer unto the same purpose. The enemies of it in the mean time are powerful, active, and restless; many amongst us being uncertain in their minds, as not resolved where to fix their interest, and a greater multitude, like Gallio, care for none of these

things. This being a matter therefore wherein all men, who have any sense of religion, are so deeply concerned, it may not be unseasonable, briefly to inquire what is this Protestant religion which is so contended about; what is its present state in the world; what its strength and weakness as unto its public profession, and what is like to be the issue of the present contest. This is that which the ensuing leaves are designed unto: and it is hoped they may be of use unto some, to extricate their minds from involved fruitless thoughts, to direct them in their duty, and to bring them unto an acquiescency in the will of God.

The Protestant religion may be considered either as it is religion in general, that is, Christian religion; or as it is distinct from and opposite unto another pretended profession of the same religion, whereon it is called Protestant.

In the first sense of it, it derives its original from Christ and his apostles. What they taught to be believed, what they commanded to be observed in the worship of God; all of it, and nothing but that, is the Protestant religion. Nothing else belongs unto it, in nothing else is it concerned. These, therefore, are the principles of the religion of Protestants, whereinto their faith and obedience are resolved.

1. What was revealed unto the church by the Lord Christ and his apostles, is the whole of that religion which God will and doth accept.

2. So far as is needful unto the faith, obedience, and eternal salvation of the church, what they taught, revealed, and commanded, is contained in the Scriptures of the New Testament, witnessed unto and confirmed by those of the Old.

3. All that is required of us that we may please God, be accepted with him, and come to the eternal enjoyment of him, is that we truly believe what is so revealed and taught, yielding sincere obedience unto what is commanded in the Scriptures.

Upon these principles, Protestants confidently propose their religion unto the trial of all mankind. If in any thing it be found to deviate from them, if it exceeds in any instance what is so revealed, taught, and commanded; if it be defective in the faith or practice of any thing that is so revealed or commanded, they are ready to renounce it. Here

they live and die, from the foundation they will not depart : this is their religion.

And if these principles will not secure us, as unto our present acceptance with God in religion, and the eternal enjoyment of him, he hath left all mankind at an utter uncertainty to make a blind venture for an invisible world ; which is altogether inconsistent with his infinite wisdom, goodness, and benignity.

Being in possession of these principles of truth and security from Christ and his apostles, it belongs unto the Protestant religion not to change or forego them, and to repose our confidence in the infallibility or authority of the pope of Rome, or of the church whereof he is the head. For these principles of assurance are such as every way become the wisdom and goodness of God ; and such as that our nature is not capable in this life, of those which are higher, or of a more illustrious evidence. Let the contrary unto either of these be demonstrated, and we will renounce the Protestant religion. To forego them for such as are irreconcilable unto divine wisdom and goodness, as also to the common reason of mankind, is an effect of the highest folly and of strong delusion.

For that all mankind should be obliged to place all their confidence and assurance of pleasing God, of living unto him, and coming unto the enjoyment of him for eternity, on the pope of Rome and his infallibility, however qualified and circumstantiated, considering what these popes are and have been, is eternally irreconcilable unto the greatness, wisdom, love, and kindness of God ; as also unto the whole revelation made of himself by Jesus Christ. The principles of Protestant religion before mentioned, do every way become, are highly suited unto, the nature and goodness of God. No man living shall ever be able to instance in one tittle of them, that is not correspondent with divine goodness and wisdom. But on the first naming of this other way, no man who knows any thing what the pope is, and what is his church, if he be not blinded with prejudice and interest, will be able to satisfy himself that it is consistent with infinite goodness and wisdom to commit the salvation of mankind, which he values above all things, unto such a security.

Neither hath this latter way any better consistency with

human wisdom, or the common reason of mankind ; namely, that those who are known, many of them, to be better and wiser men than those popes, should resolve their religion, and therein their whole assurance of pleasing God, with all their hopes of a blessed eternity, into the authority and infallibility of the pope and his church ; seeing many of them, the most of them, especially for some ages, have been persons wicked, ignorant, proud, sensual, and brutish in their lives.

This then is the foundation of the Protestant religion, in that it is built on those principles, which are every way suited unto the divine nature and goodness, as also satisfactory unto human reason ; with a refusal of them which are unworthy of infinite wisdom to give, and the ordinary reason of men to admit or receive.

Secondly, As the name Protestant is distinctive with respect unto some other pretended profession of Christian religion ; so it derives this denomination from them who in all ages, after the apostacy of the church of Rome came to be expressly antichristian, departed from the communion of it, opposed it, reformed themselves, and set up the true worship of God according unto the degrees and measures of gospel light which they had received.

This was done successively in a long tract of time through sundry ages, until by an accession of multitudes, princes and people, unto the same profession, they openly testified and protested against the papal apostacy and tyranny, whence they became to be commonly called Protestants. And the principles whereon they all of them proceeded from the first to last, which constitute their religion as Protestant, were these that follow :

1. That there are in the Scripture, propheties, predictions, and warnings, especially in the book of the Revelation, and the Second Epistle of Paul the apostle to the Thessalonians, that there should be a great apostacy or defection in the visible church from the faith, worship, and holiness of the gospel ; and in opposition unto what was appointed of Christ, the erection of a worldly, carnal, antichristian church-state, composed of tyranny, idolatry, and persecution, which should for a long time oppress the true worshippers of Christ with bloody cruelty, and at last be itself ‘consumed with the

spirit of his mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of his coming.'

This defection was so plainly foretold, as also the beginning of it in a mystery of iniquity designed even in the days of the apostles, that believers in all ages did expect the accomplishment of it by the introduction of an antichristian state and power, though the manner of it was hidden from them, until it was really fulfilled. I say from the days of the apostles, and the giving out of those prophecies and predictions of the coming of antichrist and an apostate church-state with him, all Christians in all ages did believe and expect that it should come, until its real coming, in a way and manner unexpected, confounded their apprehensions about it.

2. Their second principle as Protestants was, that this defection and antichristian church-state so plainly foretold by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, was openly and visibly accomplished in the church of Rome, with the nations that had subjected themselves unto the yoke thereof. Therein they found and saw all that tyranny and oppression, all that pride and self-exaltation above every thing that hath the name of God upon it, all that idolatry and false worship, all that departure from the faith of the gospel, all that contempt of evangelical obedience, which were foretold to come in under, and constitute the fatal apostacy.

3. Hereon their third principle was, that as they valued the glory of God, the honour of Christ and the gospel, their own salvation, and the good of the souls of others, they were obliged to forsake and renounce all communion with that apostate church, though they saw that their so doing would cost many of them their dearest blood, or lives.

4. They were convinced hereon, that it was their duty publicly to protest against all those abominations, to reform themselves as unto faith, worship, and conversation, according unto the rules before laid down, as those that are fundamental unto Christian religion.

These were the principles whereon Christian religion, as it is Protestant, was reintroduced into the world, after it had been not only obscured, but almost excluded out of it, as unto its public profession. And these principles are avowed by all true Protestants, as those whereon they are

ready at all times to put their cause and profession on the trial.

The way whereby the profession of this Protestant religion was introduced on these principles, and made public in the world under the antichristian apostacy, was the same whereby Christian religion entered the world under paganism; namely, by the prayers, preaching, writings, sufferings, and holiness of life of them who embraced it and were called to promote it. And herein their sufferings for the number of them that suffered, and variety of all cruel preparations of death, are inexpressible. It is capable of a full demonstration, that those who were slain by the sword, and otherwise destroyed for their testimony unto Christ and the gospel, in opposition unto the papal apostacy and idolatry, did far exceed the number of them that suffered for the Christian religion in all the pagan persecutions of old. A plant so soaked and watered with the blood of the martyrs, will not be so easily plucked up as some imagine. Nay it is probable it will not go out without more blood (of sufferers I mean) than it was introduced by; which yet no man knows how to conceive or express.

But it had no sooner fixed its profession in some nations, but it was loaden with all manner of reproaches, charged with all the evils that fell out in the world after its entrance, and by all sorts of arts and pretences rendered suspected and hateful unto princes and potentates. Whatever is evil in or unto mankind, especially unto the interest of great men, was with great noise and clamour charged on it. For so it was in the first entrance of the Christian religion under paganism. There was neither plague, nor famine, nor earthquake, nor inundation of water, nor war, nor invasion by enemies, but all was charged on that new religion. And the reason hereof was, not only the hatred of the truth through the love of sin and unrighteousness, and an ingrafted power of superstition through blind devotion, but principally because for a long tract of time, the whole of the profession of religion had been suited unto the secular interests of men, supplying them under various pretences with power, domination, territories, titles, revenues, wealth, ease, grandeur, and honour, with an insinuation into, and power over, the consciences of all sorts of persons; a thing

very desirable to men of corrupt minds, and easily turned into an engine unto very bad and pernicious ends. That the whole complex, and all its parts in their various motions and operations, of the Christian religion in the papacy, is framed and fitted unto these ends, so as to give satisfaction unto all corrupt and ambitious desires in men, is palpable unto all that are not wilfully blind. But this Protestant religion so introduced, stated the interest of Christian religion in a way and design utterly inconsistent herewith and destructive of it. And this was to give all glory and honour to God and Christ alone, and to teach the guides of the church to be humble, holy, zealous ensamples of the flock; utterly renouncing all secular power and domination, with territories, titles, and great revenues on the account of their office, and the discharge of it. And was it any wonder that those who were in possession of three parts of the power, and a third part of the revenue of most nations in Europe, should look on this principle as the worst of devils, and so represent it, as to frighten above half the monarchs of these nations from once looking steadily upon it, whereby they might have easily discovered the cheat that was put upon them? And thus was it with the first planters of Christian religion with respect unto the pagans; Acts xix. 27.

But herein many labour to make a difference between the introduction of religion under paganism, and the reformation of it under antichristianism. For they say that the first professors of Christian religion, for three hundred years, endured their persecutions with all patience, never once stirring up either wars or commotions in the defence of their profession; but since, upon and after the introduction of Protestant religion, there have been many tumults and disorders, many popular commotions and wars, which have been caused thereby. For if all the professors of it had quietly suffered themselves to have been killed with the sword, or hanged, or burned, or tortured to death in the inquisition, or starved in dungeons (and more was not required of them), there would have been no such wars about religion in the world. For their enemies intended nothing but to destroy them in peace and quietness, without the least disturbance unto the civil rule among men.



I say this difference did not arise from any difference in the religion of the one and the other, nor of the principles of those by whom they were professed ; but it hath proceeded from external causes and circumstances, that were greatly different between the primitive Christians and the Protestants in some places and nations. For the primitive Christians, whose story we have, were all of them placed in, and subject unto, one empire. In that whole empire and all the provinces of it, there was not one law, custom, or usage giving the least countenance unto right of protection of liberty. There was not one prince, ruler, senate, governor, that had the least pretence of legal right to protect or defend them in their profession against the will and law of the emperor or empire. The outward rights of religion were no way allied in any thing unto the civil rights of men. However numerous therefore the Christians were in those days, they were all absolutely private persons, without pretence of law or right to defend themselves ; in which state of things it is the undoubted principle of all Protestants, that where men are persecuted merely on the account of religion, without relation unto the civil rights and liberties of mankind, their duty is patiently to suffer without the least resistance. But it hath been otherwise upon the reformation, and since : for the protection and preservation of religion was taken up by sundry potentates, free princes, and cities, who had a legal right and power to protect themselves and their subjects in the profession of it. It hath been, and is at this day, incorporated into the laws, rights, and interests of sundry nations, which ought to be defended. And no instance can be given of any people defending themselves in the profession of the protestant religion by arms, but where, together with their religion, their enemies did design and endeavour to destroy those rights, liberties, and privileges, which not only the light of nature, but the laws and customs of their several countries, did secure unto them as a part of their birthright inheritance. And in some places, though the name of religion hath been much used on the one side and the other ; yet it hath been neither the cause nor occasion of the wars and troubles that have been in them. And this makes their case utterly different from that of the primitive Christians.

This religion being thus reinstated in many nations, it brought forth fruit in them, even as the gospel did at its first preaching in the places whereinto it came; Col. i. 6.

It brought forth fruit in them by whom it was received, such as is the proper fruit of religion; namely, it did so in light, knowledge, truth, in holiness, in the real conversion of multitudes unto God, in good works, in the spiritual comfort of believers in life and death, with all other fruits of righteousness which are to the praise of God. Thereby also was the worship of God vindicated from idolatry and superstition, and restored in many places unto its primitive simplicity and purity.

It brought also no small advantage even unto those nations, both princes and their subjects, by whom the profession thereof was never received; as Christian religion also did of old unto the pagan world. For hereby it is that the kings and potentates of Christendom, even those of the Roman profession, have much eased themselves of that intolerable yoke of bondage that was on them unto the pope's pretended power and his impositions. For whilst all nations were in subjection to him, it was at their utmost hazard that any one king or state should contend with him about any of his demands or assumptions; for he could stir up what nation he pleased, and give them sufficient encouragement to avenge his quarrels on rebellious princes, which he also did in instances innumerable. But since so many nations fell off from all dependance on him and subjection to him by the light and profession of the Protestant religion, there is a balance of power against him, and an awe upon him in his presumptions, lest he should be dealt withal by others in the like manner. Had these western parts of the world continued under a superstitious sense of a fealty and obedience in all things due to the pope, as they were before the reformation, the king of France himself should not so easily have rejected his personal infallibility and jurisdiction as he seems to have done; but he hath now no way left to avenge himself but assassinations, which at this time may prove of very evil consequence unto himself. Wherefore the princes of Europe, as well those by whom the Protestant religion is not embraced, yea, is opposed and persecuted, as those by whom it is received, seem not so sensible of the

benefit and advantage which doth accrue unto them all thereby : for from thence alone it is, with the interest and power which it hath obtained in the world, that they are freed in their minds and in their rule, from as base a servitude and bondage, as ever persons under their denomination were subject unto.

The common people also who yet continue in the communion of the papal church, have received no small advantage by that effectual light which shines in the world from the principles of this religion, even where it is not received. For from the fear of the discoveries to be made by it, hath a curb been put upon the flagitious lives of the priests and friars, wherewith all places were defiled ; shame also with necessity having stirred them up to deliver themselves in some measure from their old stupid ignorance. Many retrenchments have been made also in some of the most gross parts of idolatry, that were for many ages in general practice among them. And they are hereby also in some good measure freed from the terror of evil spirits wherewith they were continually haunted. For before the reformation, possessions, apparitions, sprites, ghosts, fiends, with silly miracles about them, filled all places, and were a great annoyance unto the common people. Somewhat there was no doubt of the juggling of priests in these things, and somewhat of the agency of the devil, each of them making use of the other to further their own designs. But upon the first preaching of the gospel, there was an abatement made of these things in all places, which hath gone on, until they are everywhere grown the matter of scorn and contempt.

This religion being thus planted, and producing these effects, the house of Austria in both the branches of it, the imperial and the regal, espoused the antichristian interest and quarrel against it ; and for eighty years, or thereabouts, endeavoured by all ways of force and cruelty its utter extirpation. What immense treasures of wealth they have spent and wasted, what an ocean of blood they have shed, both of their own subjects and others in the pursuit of this design, cannot be well conceived. But what hath been the issue of all their undertakings to this end ? They have so far broken themselves and their power in their obstinate

pursuit of them, that those who not long since thought of nothing less than a universal monarchy, are forced to seek unto Protestant states and nations, to preserve them from immediate ruin. So vain, foolish, and fruitless for the most part, are the deep counsels and projections of men, so destructive and ruinous unto themselves in the issue, when their desires and designs are enlarged beyond the bounds which right and equity have fixed unto them; especially will they be so, when they are found fighting against God and his interest in the world. And if the same design be now pursued by another, it will in time come unto the same catastrophe.

I shall not speak any thing of the present state of this Protestant religion, as unto its political interests in the world. It is in general known to most, and hath been particularly inquired into by many. I shall only briefly consider something of its weakness, its danger, and what is like to be the issue of it, as unto its public profession in the world; which are the subjects of many men's daily converse.

The political weakness of the Protestant religion ariseth solely from the divisions that are among them by whom it is professed. And these are of two sorts: First, Such as are of a civil nature amongst princes and states; and, secondly, Such as are religious among divines and churches. As unto the first of these, some good men who value religion above all their earthly concerns, measuring other men, even princes who profess religion, by themselves, have been almost astonished that there is not such a thing as a Protestant interest so prevalent amongst them, as to subordinate all particular contests and designings unto itself. But whereas there was formerly an appearance of some such thing, which had no small influence on public counsels, and produced some good useful effects; at present it seems to be beyond hopes of a revival, and is of little consideration in the world. Could such a thing be expected, that the nations and the powers of them which publicly profess the Protestant religion, should avow the preservation and protection of it to be their principal interest, and regulate their counsels accordingly, giving this the pre-eminence in all things, their adversaries would be content to dwell quietly at home, without offering much at their disturbance. But these things

are not of my present consideration, nor do I think that any sort of men shall have the glory of preserving the interest of Christ in the world ; he will do it himself.

Again, The religious differences that are amongst them as churches, do weaken the political interest of Protestants. They have done so from the very beginning of the reformation. And when the first differences among them were in some measure digested and brought unto some tolerable composure, about sixty years ago there was an inroad made on the doctrine that had been received among the reformed churches by novel opinions, which hath grown unto this day to the great weakening of the whole interest. And as far as I can see, it is in vain to dissuade men from contending about their small allotments in the house, or it may be but some supposed appurtenances of them, whilst others are visibly digging at the foundation to oppress them all with the fall of the whole fabric. In these things lies the sole outward political weakness of the Protestant interest in the world, whose direful effects God alone can prevent.

We may hereon inquire, what at present is like to be the issue and event of this Protestant religion, as unto its public profession in the world. For the adversaries of it do every day discover not only their desires and endeavours for its extirpation, but their expectations also of its speedy ruin. They suppose the time is come when that heresy, as they call it, which hath so long infested the northern nations, shall by their arts, contrivances, and power, be utterly rooted out. And it is known that those discoveries of their minds and hopes herein, which have occasionally come unto light amongst us, are but indications of those counsels and combinations in other places and among other persons, whereby their hopes are to be accomplished. And if it were unto our present purpose, much might be offered to manifest that those consultations and contrivances which are constant in the managers of the papal interest both at Rome and elsewhere, for the utter extirpation of the Protestant religion, have been ordered, disposed, and cast into such methods, as not only to stir up all means of expedition, but also with respect unto a speedy immediate execution.

We shall therefore briefly inquire, by what way and means this may be effected, or what is like to give this de-

sign an accomplishment, giving every thing its due weight and consideration; for what the event will be God only knows.

The ruin of the Protestant religion, as unto its public profession, must be either by a general defection from it, or by a force upon it, or by a reconciliation and coalescency with the Roman church.

This defection must be either of the princes, or of the clergy, or of the people, or of them all in conjunction.

Of the first, or the defection of princes unto the papacy we have had some instances in the last age, but scarce of any who have been absolutely sovereign or supreme; unless it be of one, who together with her religion, wisely and honestly left her crown. But I suppose there lieth here no great danger or fear as to kings, or such as on whose authority the profession of religion in their dominions doth much depend. For they are too wise to be weary of their present station and liberty. Who can suppose that any of them would be willing to stand at the gates of the pope's palace barefoot, for a night and a day, and be disciplined to boot, as it was with one of the greatest kings of England? or to hold the pope's stirrup, whilst he mounted his horse, and be rebuked for want of breeding in holding it on the wrong side? or would they lie on the ground, and have their necks trod upon by the pope, which a courageous emperor was forced to submit unto? or have their crowns kicked from their heads by the foot of a legate? or be assassinated for not promoting the papal interest in the way and mode of them concerned, as it was with two kings of France?

It will be said, that these things are past and gone, the popes have now no such power as formerly; and the kings that are of the Roman church, do live as free from impositions on them by the pretensions of papal power, as any kings on the earth. But supposing such a change, and that the king of France, as great as he is, do find in the issue that there is such a change, yet if we do not know the reasons of it, they do. Is it because the maintainers of the papacy have changed their principles and opinions in this matter? Is it that they have disclaimed the power and authority which they exercised in former ages? Is it from any abatement of the papal omnipotency in their judgment? Do

they think that the popes had not right to do what they did in those days, or that they have not yet right to do the like again? It is none of those nor any reason of this sort that is the cause of the pretended change. The true and only reason of it is, the balancing of their power by the Protestant interest. So many kings, princes, potentates, states, and nations, being not only fallen off from that blind obedience and subjection wherein they were universally enthralled unto them in those days, but ready to oppose them in all their attempts to execute their pretended power, they are forced for a season to lower their sails, and to pluck in those horns wherewith formerly they pushed kings and princes unto their ruin. Should there be a restoration of their power and interest in the minds of men, which would ensue on the extirpation of the Protestant religion, the greatest kings of Europe should quickly find themselves yoked and over-matched both in their own dominions, and by such as will be ready to execute their designs. And on this supposition they will cross all experience of former ages, if having weathered their difficulties and conquered their opposers, they be not more haughty and secure in the execution of their power and pretended office, than ever they were before.

Whatever delusion therefore may befall sovereign princes in their personal capacities, none of them can be so forsaken of common understanding, as not to see that by a defection unto the papacy, they bring a bondage on themselves and their subjects, from which God by his providence, through the light and truth of the Protestant religion, had set them free. And it is certain enough that there is at this day so much rational light diffused in the world, that even those who on various inducements may comply with any of them in the reintroduction of popery into any of their territories, will quickly find what condition of slavery and contempt they have brought themselves into, and thereon make the new posture of affairs very uneasy to themselves and their rulers. Yea, no sort of men will be given up unto more furious reflections, first on themselves, and then on others, than they will be, when they find themselves ensnared. Those who on such occasions have neither deceived themselves, nor suffered themselves to be deceived by others, may enjoy a sedate tranquillity of mind in all that shall befall them; but

these, when they have digested the shame of being deluded, will be restless in their minds, and intent on new occasions. I suppose, therefore, there is no great danger to be feared on this hand, and if there should, that the event of counsels mixed with so much madness and ingratitude will be a sudden catastrophe.

And as unto the clergy, there can be no defection amongst them, unless it be from a weariness of their present station, upon the principles of the protestant religion. For they have most of them too much light to be corrupted any way but by interest. Now the principles intended are these two : (1.) That the reverence which they claim, and the revenues which they possess, are not due unto them merely on the account of their offices and the titles which they bear, but on that of their faithful discharge of their office in diligent laborious preaching of the gospel, and sedulous endeavours for the conversion and edification of the souls of men. This principle lay at the foundation of the reformation, and was one of the greatest means of its promotion. (2.) That a distinction from the people by sacred office, requires indispensably a distinction from them in gravity, usefulness, and holiness of conversation. If men should grow weary of their station in the clergy on those principles (and others the Protestant religion will not afford them), it is to be feared that on provoking occasions they may verge unto that church-state, wherein all things desirable unto them in this world will be secured on easier terms. And the danger will be increased, if they are capable of envy and vexation from those principles of light and liberty which have been communicated unto the people by the Protestant religion, rendering all expectations of reverence and honour but what ariseth from, and is proportionate unto, real worth and usefulness, altogether vain. And if hereon they are exposed to impressions from the wealth, ease, and power, proposed unto them in the papal church, it is to be feared that they may regulate themselves by opportunities. And on these grounds, not a few ministers in France, being withal at the same time under the dread of trouble and persecution, have gone over unto the adverse party. In the mean time there is some relief herein, that the generality of mankind is so far enlightened, that no pleas or pretences of other reasons for



such a change or defection will bear the least admittance, but it will be ascribed unto corrupt affection and carnal interest. However, if it be contained, as many judge it is, in the prophecies of the Revelation, that the churches of the nations who were once of the communion, and in subjection unto the church of Rome, shall be restored unto her power and possession again, at least for a short season, this sort of men must be signally instrumental therein. And if there be any nations where these two things concur, that all church or ecclesiastical power and jurisdiction is, by the law of the land, vested in the king, being as unto its whole exercise derived from him alone, whereby that which he is, the church is as to power and jurisdiction, and nothing else; and where the clergy do hold and derive their spiritual power, their power of order and office, by a flux and descent of it from the church of Rome and the authority thereof, upon the accession of a Papist unto supreme rule, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, long to secure the public profession of the Protestant religion in such nations. I say in this case, although the Protestant religion may be preserved in multitudes of individuals and their voluntary societies in the communion of it; yet in such a church-state its public profession cannot long be continued; for it will quickly be dissolved by its own intestine differences; which every wise man may easily foresee. But the force of law, interest, and inclination, is hardly to be withstood.

The danger of defection from the profession of the Protestant religion in the people, must be measured from the preparations for it that are found amongst them, and the means of their furtherance. Now these are nothing but the vicious habits of the minds of men, inclining their affections to take shelter in the papal superstition. Such are ignorance, lewdness of conversation, provocations from the power of religion in others, atheism and interest, from hopes of advantage proposed unto some of them who have an influence on others. There can be no defection unto popery in or among the people, who have ever known any thing of the Protestant religion, but what proceeds from these causes, which wholly obliterate all sense of its power, all delight in its truth, and dispose men unto any thing wherein they hope they may find a better compliance with their in-

clinations, or at least free them from that whereof they are weary, and wherein they find no advantage. And the means whereby these things are promoted in them, are want of due instruction, examples of sin and impunity therein, public discountenance of the power of religion, personal and family necessities through pride or sensuality, with desire of revenge.

Where these things abound in any nation, amongst any people, there is no security of their stability in that profession of religion which yet they avow. For all these things will continually operate in their minds, and occasions will not be wanting in the watchful diligence of the devil and his instruments, to excite and provoke their corrupt lusts unto a declension from their profession, which with many of them will be carried on gradually and insensibly, until they find themselves ensnared in the papal interest beyond what they can extricate themselves out of.

I shall make no conjectures concerning the ruin or total loss of the public profession of the Protestant religion, from those ways and means of a general defection from it. For if there were more danger in them than there is, I know there is yet a way whereby they may be all defeated. And this being in the hand of God alone, with him it is to be left, and unto his care it is to be committed.

Force is the next way whereby the same effect may be produced. And this is that which those of the Roman interest do place their principal confidence in; and it is that which they judge they may lawfully make use of, whenever they are able so to do. Be the force esteemed necessary unto this end, of what sort it will; be it by private assassinations, legal persecutions, national oppressions, foreign invasions, all is alike unto them; they are all of them to be made use of, as their supposed opportunities do require. That which at present doth most encourage their hopes and expectations on this ground of them, is the power and inclinations of the French monarch, and the influence they have on the counsels and actings of other nations. But that whole business seems to me on many accounts, to be but '*res unius ætatis*' at most; many countries may be ravaged and spoiled, and new work cut out for another age, but a stated interest for the papal advantage will scarcely

be fixed thereby. They must be a people of another temper and complexion of mind than our neighbours are, of a more profound melancholy and superstition than they are subject unto; of less vehement desires of their own, and less subject to alter in their designs on provocations and disappointments, who are fit pertinaciously to pursue the advancement of the papal power and dominion, wherein themselves at length shall be no sharers. But where there is a concurrence of all these things; namely, an inclination in many of all sorts unto a defection, preparations in the minds of more thereunto, the persecution of some so far as the laws will permit, and just fears of a greater outward force, relief and safety is to be expected only from divine power and goodness.

The third way whereby the public profession of the Protestant religion may be ruined in any nation, or universally, is by a reconciliation unto the church of Rome. For although this be really of the same nature and kind with that of the defection before spoken of, yet seeing it is to be effected by a pretended mutual condescension, it will be averred to be different from a total defection. That which I intend is a coalescency in the same church-state, faith, worship, and rule with the church of Rome, on such concessions, and reliefs from some present impositions, as shall on both sides be agreed on. And this is the most plausible engine for attaining the fatal end designed, that can be made use of; and possibly the most likely to take effect. The pretences of the peace of Christendom, and the union of Christians (though nothing less be intended, than that peace and union which Christ hath appointed; nor will the peace pretended be ever attained by it), are suited to cover and overwhelm men with reproaches, who shall but endeavour to discover their falsity and folly. But the present posture of counsels and affairs in the world, calls for somewhat a more distinct consideration of these things, which yet shall be but preparatory unto what shall be farther discoursed unto the same purpose, if the process in the design do farther manifest itself.

From the very beginning of the reformation there have been various attempts for a composition of the differences between the church of Rome, and those who were departed

from it. Councils of princes, conventions of divines, imperial edicts, sedate consultations of learned men, have all been made use of unto this end, and all in vain. And it was for awhile the judgment of most wise men, that the council of Trent had rendered all reconciliations, so much as by a pretence of any condescension on the part of Rome, utterly impossible. For it hath bound itself and all the world that will own its authority, under solemn curses, not to make any change or alteration in the present state of the papal church, though the salvation of all men living should depend thereon.

Yet notwithstanding the fixing of this impassable gulf between the two churches or religions, some persons professing the Protestant religion, either angry at their station and disappointments in the world, or ambitious above their station in the Protestant church, though of the highest dignity attainable in it; or out of an itch or curiosity of venting their conciliatory notions, as they suppose them, and so to entitle themselves unto the name of peacemakers, have in the foregoing and present age revived the same fruitless design, but hitherto without success.

But it must be confessed, that at present things are more prepared for the plying of this engine, and making it effectual unto the ruin of the Protestant religion, than they were in former ages; whereof I shall give some instances.

Sundry learned men, who have made themselves of great name and reputation thereby, have in their public writings granted a patriarchal primacy in the west unto the bishop of Rome, which is meet to be restored. And therewithal they have relinquished the true grounds of the reformation. For whereas the real causes and reasons of it were the idolatry, heresies, and tyranny, of the church of Rome, which every private Christian might understand, and was bound to separate from in his own person, were there no other of his mind in the world but himself alone, and had right so to do; they have resolved it into the power of a national church in that patriarchate, with their supreme civil ruler, to reform itself from such things as they esteem abuses. Now as this is a matter wherein the consciences of the people or private Christians are not concerned; so it is built on sundry arbitrary presumptions that have not the

least countenance given unto them from the word of God. And as this endeavour tends directly to divert the minds of men from the true causes and reasons of the reformation, whereon all the martyrs died; so it leads directly upon a relief against the pretended abuses, to return unto the pope as a head of unity and peace unto all churches, at least in these western parts of the world, which is all that at present is pleaded for, by many of the Papists themselves. For the dispute, they say, about the pope, his power and infallibility, you need not trouble yourselves; let the bishop of Rome in his succession from St. Peter be acknowledged as a head of unity and peace unto all Christians, with a patriarchal power, and no more shall be required of you, that is at present; for the pope will be pope whilst he is so; that is, until he is utterly cast out of the church. But by such concessions as these, the way is preparing for a composition as unto the outward order and rule of the church.

As unto the internal part of religion, in doctrines of faith, there is no small advance towards a reconciliation in the introduction of novel opinions into the Protestant profession. For although on their first entrance among us, they were publicly protested against by the Commons of England in parliament, as introductory of popery; yet their prevalency since hath been so great, as that their abettors are ready to avow them as the doctrine of the present church. Yet are they all of them opposite unto the fundamental principles of the reformation, which were to exalt the grace of God, and debase the pride of men; from the contempt of which principles, all the abominations of the papacy did arise. And this progress towards a reconciliation is daily improved by the endeavours of some to lessen all the doctrinal differences between the Papists and Protestants, and to make them appear as things not worth the striving or contending about.

The same work is carried on by the labours and endeavours of many in their public writings, to divert the making application of Scripture prophecies and predictions of an apostatical antichristian church-state, unto the church of Rome. The persuasion hereof (as it is a most undoubted truth wherein the souls of men are concerned) is the principal means of preserving the body of the people in an aversa-

tion unto popery. If you can once persuade them, that the pope is not antichrist, that the church of Rome is not that idolatrous tyrannical state foretold in the Scripture, many would be very indifferent how you treat with them, or what composition you shall make for yourselves. But it is hoped, that the broad light which ariseth from the evidence the pope and his church for many ages have given of themselves so to be, by their idolatries, persecutions, murders, Luciferian pride, trampling on the power and persons of kings and all sorts of persons, in conjunction with the characteristic notes of times, places, rise, progress, nature, and actings of that church-state in the Scripture, will not easily be extinguished.

There is no small prevalency in the world of an atheistical principle lately advanced, namely, of resolving all respect unto the public profession of religion into the wills and laws of men in supreme power. It is supposed herein, that men may be in their own minds of what religion they please, and be as religious as they will; but for the preservation of society, it is meet that the wills of lawgivers in all nations should be the sole rule of the outward profession of religion. Now although this atheistical opinion be destructive of Christian religion, condemning all the professors of it from its first entrance into the world of the highest folly imaginable, yet being suited to accommodate all the lusts and interests of men profane and ungodly, it is incredible what a progress in a short time it hath made in the world. And those who have imbibed it are ready for all such compositions in religion, as may be supposed any way commodious unto their inclinations and interests.

I shall only mention that which of all other things is of the worst abode, namely, the loss of the power of religion in all sorts of persons. The Protestant religion will not any where long maintain its station any otherwise, than by an experience of its power and efficacy on the souls of men. Where this is lost through the power of prevalent vicious habits of the minds of men, the whole of that religion will be parted withal at an easy rate. For there is another continually proposed unto them, with those entertainments for men's fancies and carnal affections, with those accommodations for their lusts living and dying, with outward secu-

lar advantages, that this religion is not capable of, nor accompanied withal.

This is that which guided with an eye to outward advancement, hath in the last age lost great numbers of the nobility of France and Poland, and other places, from the profession of the gospel, whose ancestors were renowned champions for the truth of it. For to what end should men entertain a religion which they find no inward spiritual advantage by, and are for the profession of it exposed unto all sorts of outward disadvantages? And this sort of men, will at any time greedily embrace such a reconciliation with the church of Rome, as by the terms of it may a little shelter their reputation, and make a pretence of satisfying some traditional convictions of the truth which they had professed.

Moreover, unless it be diligently watched against, weariness is apt to grow on many of the clergy, of that spiritual rule and conduct of the people, which according to the principles of the Protestant religion, is committed unto them. For there hath by virtue thereof, so much light and knowledge been diffused among the people, and such a valuation of their spiritual liberty thereon, which formerly they knew nothing of, that there is an excellent virtue and piety, with continual care and watchfulness required unto the rule of them; and yet, when the best of men have done their utmost herein also, they will meet with that which shall exercise their wisdom and patience all their days. Neither hath Christ granted any rule or office in his church on any other terms; nor will the state of his subjects, who are all volunteers, permit it to be otherwise. No wonder then if some do like those engines of an easy rule, namely, ignorance and blind devotion in the people, and so are ready to return unto them again. For it is a monstrous wearisome thing for men of heroic governing spirits, to be obliged to give conviction from the Scripture unto such persons as they judge impertinent, of what they do; much more to order their conversation with strictness, that no offence be taken at them. This posture of things men seem to be weary of, and therefore do daily relinquish them, so far as they can pretend any consistency between what they do, and the religion which they profess. But the utter shaking

off of those bonds and manacles, unworthy of men of generous spirits, must needs seem more eligible unto them. And if hereon such terms of reconciliation be offered, as shall not only secure unto them their present possessions and dignities, but give them also a prospect of farther advancement, it is to be feared that many of this sort will judge it better to embrace things so desirable, than to die in a prison, or at a stake.

Besides all these, there is at present a coincidence of two things, that exceedingly incline the minds of many unto an ecclesiastical coalescency with the church of Rome. And these are, first, an ignorance or forgetfulness of what the papacy was, and will again be; and then a sense of some provocations given, or supposed to be given them, by the Protestant religion, or those that profess it. Alas! what harm hath the papacy ever done to them? It may be they can give instances wherein they have had advantage by it, or by them that belong unto it. But every thing which they suppose evil, and find inconvenient unto their present inclinations, they suspect to proceed from the principles of the Protestant religion, from whence they have already received many provocations.

These are some of the reasons which make it evident, that there may be no small danger unto the public profession of the Protestant religion, the thing inquired after, from the present design of not a few, to make a reconciliation of the two religions, and to bring all men into a coalescency in faith, worship, and rule with the church of Rome. Now as there is little hope to prevail with them who are under the power of these things and considerations, or are influenced by them, by arguments religious and rational, seeing they have all of them their foundation in such corrupt affections, inclinations, and interests, as are more deaf than an adder unto such charms; yet, for the sake of others not as yet engaged by such prejudices, I shall manifest in a few instances the folly and wickedness of attempting, or complying with any reconciliation with the church of Rome.

For, in the first place, be it on what terms it will, it is a renunciation of the fundamental principle of the reformation; namely, that the church of Rome is that idolatrous antichristian state which is foretold in the Scriptures. For



if it be so, the persons that belong unto it may be converted, but the state itself is to be destroyed. And to join ourselves unto, or coalesce in, that church-state on any terms whatever, that the Lord Christ hath designed to destruction, is both foolish in itself, and will be ruinous in the issue unto our souls.

For it will hence also follow, that we interest ourselves in the guilt of all that innocent blood which hath been shed by the power of that church-state for a dissent from it. For this guilt, which is next unto that of the church of the Jews in murdering the head of the church, and every way equal unto that of the pagan world in the blood shed in their persecutions, for which it was temporally and eternally destroyed, lies charged on this church-state, and will reach unto all that shall choose an ecclesiastical conjunction therein. And let such persons flatter themselves whilst they please, and slight these things, as those wherein they are not concerned, they will find them true to their cost, here or hereafter.

Neither will men of any light or ingenuity easily renounce the whole work of God's grace and power in the reformation, and cast the guilt of all the divisions that have been in the world, on the part of the Protestants. For seeing they have all been on the account of the church-state of Rome, in opposition whereunto the martyrs laid down their lives, a coalescency on any terms in and with that church-state, doth include a condemnation of all that hath been done or suffered in opposition thereunto. The preaching of the gospel hath been but a fancy; the suffering of the martyrs was the highest folly; the glory given to God on these accounts, little less than blasphemy, is the language of such a coalescency.

The vanity also of the terms of reconciliation which are or may be proposed, is obvious unto all that are not wilfully blind. For the church of Rome preserving its essentially constitutive principles, and its being as such, can make no such condescensions, as shall not keep safe and secure the whole malignity of their faith and worship. When any thing that hath the show, or appearance of a concession, as suppose priests' marriage, the cup unto the laity, and the service of the church in a known tongue is proposed, it is natural

for all men to commend and approve of what is so done, because it is a kind of relinquishment of things grievous and tyrannical. At the first proposal few will judge these things to be sufficient, but will encourage themselves in an expectation of farther condescensions; and will be ready to assure others that they will ensue; but yet, when they find themselves defeated herein, they will take up the management of the cause, and contend, that this is enough at present for sober men, seeing no more can be attained. But in reality this reconciliation will prove a total defection from the Protestant religion. For the church of Rome neither will, nor can, part with any thing that shall change its antichristian state and idolatrous worship. The whole of their pretension is but a decoy to get us into their power, where we shall be made to understand both where we are, and where we have been also. And those which shall be most inclinable unto such a reconciliation as is designed, unless they also become flagitious persecutors of those whom they have left, as is the manner of most apostates, will find their former faults called over to the purpose, and such base acknowledgments required of them, as ingenuous persons would rather choose to die than be brought unto. But although universal experience confirms this to be the certain and undoubted issue of a return unto their power, from which men are judged to have broken away unjustly, whatever salvos seem to be provided against it; yet those that cannot think it shall be so with them, but rather that they shall be dearly embraced, and highly promoted, if not for their return, yet for their being early and sedulous therein. But if they find this entertainment with them, who have every thing which they think good, as conscience and religion, and every thing that is really evil, as pride, ambition, and revenge, to oblige them unto the contrary, I shall not be alone in being deceived. But this one consideration is sufficient to cast out all thoughts of any reconciliation with the church of Rome. For although they should never so earnestly desire it, as that which would bring dominion, profit, advantage, and reputation unto them, yet is it not in their power, continuing what they are, to make any such concessions as shall alter their state, or once touch the reasons of the Protestants' de-

parture from them. And seeing what they suppose they may grant, will not be upon a conviction of truth, that such ought to be, as if before they had been in a mistake, but only to comply with a present exigence for their advantage, it will be recalled whenever they judge it meet to take it away again.

Upon the whole matter, the reconciliation designed on the most plausible terms that have ever yet been proposed, is nothing but a hoodwinked defection to Rome, accumulated with a charge on the consciences of them who shall comply therewith, of the guilt of all the miseries and blood of them by whom it will be refused.

But there are, on the other side, certain considerations that may be laid in the balance against these dangers or the fears of them as unto the event; and I shall briefly mention them also. For,

1. The honour of Christ himself seems to be engaged for the preservation of the light and truth of the gospel where it hath been professed. And so it is undoubtedly, unless the sins and ingratitude of the generality of them by whom it is professed, do require that they be dealt withal in his severity. In that case the glory and honour of Christ are more engaged to remove and take away the blessing of it from any place or people, than to put forth his power for its preservation and continuance. Now although it must be acknowledged, that the sins of these and other Protestant nations, have been of a high provoking nature unto the eyes of his glory; yet it may be hoped that they have not exceeded the bounds of his patience and forbearance. And whether it be so or no, there will be a speedy discovery. For, if on the many intimations which he hath given them of his displeasure, his many calls to repentance mixed with threatenings, they will now at last return unto him from the evil of their ways, and make their repentance evident by the fruits of it, he will undoubtedly continue his presence among them and his care over them.

But if notwithstanding all that they hear, and feel, and fear at present, notwithstanding all divine warnings and indications of his displeasure, they will go on frowardly in their own ways, unto the high dishonour of himself and his

gospel, causing his name and ways to be blasphemed among the idolatrous nations, the event must be left in the depths of infinite wisdom with sovereign grace and mercy.

2. Notwithstanding all that profaneness and wickedness of life wherein multitudes are immersed who outwardly profess the Protestant religion, there is a remnant in the nations where it is professed who manifest the power of it in their lives, and glorify Christ by their profession and obedience unto all his commands, walking worthy of the gospel in all holy conversation. Nor are this sort confined to any one party or peculiar way among them, but are found in the whole body or community of the Protestant profession. What influence these have on many accounts into the preservation of the light of the gospel in the places, times, and nations wherein their lot and portion is cast by divine providence, is not here to be declared; the Scripture will give a sufficient account of it.

3. There is evidently at present a spirit of courage and Christian magnanimity come upon many, whose other circumstances render them considerable in the world, to do and suffer whatever they shall lawfully be called unto, for the defence of this Protestant religion. This also is from God; and if his purpose were utterly to ruin that interest, it is more suited unto former dispensations of his providence in like cases, to send weakness, faintness, cowardice, and despondency into the hearts of those concerned, than to give them a spirit of courage and resolution for their duty. And hereunto also belongs that revival of zeal for their religion and the concernments of it, which hath of late been stirred up even in the body of the people, taking occasion from the opposition made unto it, and the dangers whereunto it hath been reduced. If these things are from God, as they seem to be, they will not be so easily run down as some imagine; for whatever means he will make use of, be they in themselves never so weak and contemptible, they shall be effectual unto the end whereunto they are designed. And therefore there is no small indication in them, that it is in the counsel of the divine will as yet to preserve the profession of the Protestant religion, though it may be sorely shaken.

4. The strange discoveries that have been made of the plots and designs of the enemies of this religion, with the

disappointment of many of them, are also a pledge of the care of God over it. Wise and considering men knew well enough that they were at work with all diligence, craft, and industry, for the accomplishment of what they had long designed, and which for some ages they had been engaged in various contrivances to bring about. But what they saw of the effects of their counsels, they could not remove; and all the specialities of their design were hid from them. The generality of men in the mean time, were in the highest security, some enjoying themselves in the advantages which they hold by the profession of religion, and others altogether regardless of these things. But in this state of things, the providence of God making use of the unparalleled confidence and precipitation of the enemies themselves, by strange and unexpected means, lays open their works of darkness, awakens the nation unto the consideration of its danger, variously disappoints their hellish plots, and puts the minds of multitudes, it may be millions, into a posture of taking care about those concernments of their religion, which they had assuredly been surprised into the loss of, had they continued in the security from which their enemies awakened them. And it may be well supposed, that nothing but sin and the highest ingratitude can divert or stop the progress of those streams of providence, whose springs were undeserved mercy and bounty.

For although the wisdom, justice, and honour of the nation in the actings of the king as supreme, of both houses of parliament, in the judges and their legal administrations, with the piety of the church in the observation of a day of fasting and prayer with respect hereunto, be every day exposed to scorn and contempt in the papers and pamphlets of unknown persons, by decrying the plot, and vilifying the discoveries of it (a practice never allowed, never tolerated in any other well-ordered government, as that which would tend to its dissolution), yet all sober men have sufficient evidence of the hand of God in these things, to make them an argument of his watchful care over the Protestant religion.

And unto all these things we may add, the fatal miscarriages and miserable ends of such apostates from the true religion, as have not been contented to ruin their own souls alone, but have been active and instrumental in their capa-

cities, to draw or drive others into the same perdition. Examples in this kind might be multiplied, sufficient to stop this sort of persons in their career, if an open discovery of the pit whereinto they will precipitate themselves, may have any influence upon them.

Some few things may yet be added concerning the outward means of the preservation of the Protestant religion as unto its public profession (for the thing itself will be preserved in despite of the world), which those concerned therein may do well to apply themselves unto. And I shall only name them at present.

And the first is, fervent prayers to Almighty God, that the princes and potentates of the earth may have light to discern that their principal interest in this world lies in its preservation. And although some reasons that may induce them hereunto, may not seem of force unto them, yet there is one that is uncontrollable. For where the Protestant religion is received, publicly professed, and established by law, it cannot be changed without the extreme havoc and ruin of the greatest and best part of their subjects, in all their temporal concerns. And this there is no doubt but that they are obliged so far as in them lies to prevent, as they will give an account unto God of the trust reposed in them. For as things are stated in the world, as the designs and interests of the parties at variance are formed, it is a madness to suppose that any alteration can be made herein, without these direful effects; and if they should be covered for a season, they will break forth afterward with more rage and fury. But I refer this unto the wisdom of them that are concerned.

It is also necessary hereunto, that all those who sincerely own this religion, and make it the rule of their living unto God, in hopes of the eternal enjoyment of him in another world, do depose the consideration of the lesser differences amongst themselves, and unite in one common design and interest to oppose the entrances and growth of popery among us. And it is a hard thing to persuade rational men, that they are in earnest for its opposition and exclusion, who are not willing so to do.

But that whereon amongst ourselves the event of this contest doth depend, is the repentance and reformation of

all them that profess this religion, upon the divine calls and warnings which they have received.

For a close of this discourse, if we may suppose what we may justly fear, namely, that the holy God, to punish the horrible sins and ingratitude of the nations professing the Protestant religion, should suffer the profession of it by any of these means or any other that he shall think meet to use in his holy permission, to be extinguished for a season, and remove the light of the gospel from these nations, we may yet conclude two things:

1. That it shall issue at last in the advantage of the church. Antichrist shall not be a final gainer in this contest; his success herein will be the forerunner of his utter destruction. The healing of his deadly wound will preserve his life but for a little while. Religion shall be again restored in a more refined profession. There shall ensue hereon no new revelations, no new doctrines, no new Scriptures, no new ordinances of worship; the substance of the Protestant doctrine, religion, and worship shall be preserved, restored, beautified in themselves, and in their power, in them by whom they shall be professed: the demonstration whereof shall be given elsewhere.

2. In the mean time, to suffer for it, even unto death, is the most glorious cause wherein we can be engaged, and wherein we shall be undoubtedly victorious. It is no less glorious in the sight of God, no less acceptable with him, to suffer in giving testimony against the abominations of the apostate antichristian church-state, than to suffer for the gospel itself in opposition to idolatrous paganism.

END OF VOL. XVII.