

A
PEACE-OFFERING,
IN
AN APOLOGY AND HUMBLE PLEA
FOR
INDULGENCE
AND
LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE:
BY SUNDRY PROTESTANTS
DIFFERING IN SOME THINGS FROM THE PRESENT ESTABLISHMENT
ABOUT THE WORSHIP OF GOD.

Ambigua de religione capita quæ plurimum habere videntur obscuritatis, tantis tamdiu animis decertata, apud sapientes hoc fere certum reliquerunt, nusquam minus inveniri veritatem, quam ubi cogitur assensus.—Hugo Grotius.

*Exiguam sedem sacris littusque rogamus
Innocuum, et cunctis undamque, auramque patentem.*

BY
JOHN OWEN

PEACE-OFFERING,

&c. &c.

THE infinitely wise and holy God, who disposeth of all things according to the counsel of his own will, having designed our portion in the world unto the latter days thereof; wherein, besides those difficulties which in all ages attend them who are called unto the search and profession of the truths of the gospel, we are forewarned of sundry evils peculiar unto them, rendering them perilous: as it is our duty to apply ourselves to serve his good pleasure in our generation, without repining at that station which in his work he hath allotted unto us; so also diligently to take care that we add not unto the evils of the days wherein we live; and that, what we may be called to suffer in them according to his will, may not be lost unto his holy ends and purposes in the world, but some way or other redound unto his glory. What shall befall us in the course of our pilgrimage, how we shall be disposed of, as to our outward temporary concernments, as it is not in our power to order and determine, so neither ought to be in our care, so as that we should be anxiously solicitous thereabouts: all things of that nature belong unto his sovereign pleasure, who will make them work together for good to them that love him. Resting in his will as to our outward state and condition in this world, with that of the times and seasons wherein our lot is fallen, which he hath put in his own power, we shall endeavour, in reference thereunto, to possess our souls in patience, waiting for that day which 'shall manifest every man's work of what sort it is.' And we know that it is but yet a little while, before it will be no grief of heart unto us, for to have done or suffered any thing for the name of the Lord Jesus, according to his mind and will. For whereas we are well assured, that the

old enemy of mankind who is sometimes awake and sowing of tares whilst men sleep, is never so far asleep, whilst any are endeavouring to sow the good seed of the gospel, as not to stir up an opposition to their work, and to labour the ruin of their persons; so we believe that every sincere endeavour to promote the holy truths and ways of God, according to that measure of light which he is pleased graciously to impart unto any of the sons of men, is accepted and owned by him 'who is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;' which is sufficient to secure their peace and consolation, under all the evils that on the account of their work they may conflict withal. Neither is it a small alleviation of any trouble that we may be exposed unto, that no pretence, colour, reason, or arguings for our sufferings, no means, ways, or kinds of them, no ends unto them, can possibly be invented, proposed, pursued, but what we are fully forwarned of; that so we might not at any time think ourselves surprised, as though some strange thing had happened unto us. This then is our great concernment in the profession of religion, this that which we ought principally to attend unto, namely, to commend our consciences unto God, that in all sincerity and godly simplicity, we exercise ourselves in the work that he calls us unto, not corrupting his word, or staining our profession by a conversation unbecoming the holiness of the gospel; and for what may outwardly befall us, though producing heaviness and sorrow for a season, the last day will manifest to have been unspeakably more the concernment of other men than our own. It is therefore on this account, and that duty which we owe unto all the sons of men, especially those who in any place or degree have rule and disposal of us in this world, and the things thereof committed unto them, that notwithstanding the hazard that attends us in the discharge of every duty of this kind, we adventure to represent our condition and desires unto all that endeavour to follow after truth with peace. For as the minds of men are capable of no greater perfection than what consists in receiving the whole truths of the gospel, nor their souls of greater blessedness than attends obedience thereunto; so every mistake of it, every prejudice against it, every opposition unto it, or any part of it, are not only in themselves a corruption and debasement of the mind, but are usually at-

tended with consequents of greater evils, in and unto them by whom they are entertained. And this condition oftentimes are men, otherwise upright and wise, cast into, either by their own ingrafted prejudices, or neglect of that severe disquisition after truth, which all the sons of it are obliged unto, or by suffering themselves to be imposed on, by the suggestions of others, who perhaps sacrifice their actings in and about the things of God, to some secular (and it may be very corrupt) ends of their own. Hence truth and innocence, which cannot be oppressed but when clothed with misrepresentations and calumnies, have in all ages been forced to suffer the sad effects of their mistakes, who in the mean time professed highly an avowment of them. So in particular, the foundation of all the miseries that ever befell the professors of the truth of Christ, since the day that the name of Christian was known in the world, and consequently of all that evil and confusion in the earth which the lusts of men have produced, and the righteous judgment of God inflicted, have lain in general, either in the ignorance of men, of the genuine nature and tendency of the truth itself, or in their credulity, in giving credit unto those misrepresentations of it, which it hath always been the interest of many in the world, to frame and promote. Hence the professors of Christianity, and every particular way therein, in their respective seasons and generations, have esteemed it their duty, not only unto themselves, to wave their imminent sufferings, if it were the will of God thereby, but unto others also, whom they judged to be engaged against God and his truth, in their persecution of them, to declare freely and fully what it was that they did believe and practise; and therein plead the equity and reasonableness of that deliverance which they aimed at; of themselves from suffering, and of others from sinning. And herein had they before their eyes, the examples of the great apostle of the Gentiles, who with various success did oftentimes make use of the like defensatives of himself and his doctrine. Nor is it the last prescription of the law of nature implanted in the heart of man by him that made it, that innocency should so far undertake its own protection and security, as to endeavour a removal of prejudicate imputations out of the minds of them, in whose judgment it is concerned. And this law all men univer-

sally yield obedience unto, who intend not to abuse such imputations unto sinister ends, not suitable unto the innocency they profess, and so by deserting their own unblamable defence, contract a guilt rendering them incapable of it for the future. Whereas therefore it hath pleased him in whose hand our life and breath, and all our ways are, to place us in that condition, wherein by the apprehensions he hath given us of his mind and will, in some things relating unto his worship, we are forced to differ from others, we conceive it our duty, for the prevention of farther evils, openly and candidly to declare both what we profess, and what in all humility we desire thereupon: and we cannot but hope, that when the matters of our difference are known and considered, that they will not be judged of so high a demerit, as to render a modest peaceable desire of indulgence in our adherence unto them, a new addition of guilt. For their case is miserable indeed, who being prejudged into a condition of sufferings, though not convinced of evil, may not desire relief from those who alone are able to afford it; that also being made an aggravation of their misery, by being made an aggravation of their supposed guilt.

And in particular, this course is made at this season necessary unto us, from the exasperation of the minds of many, in reference unto what we possess and desire, with the prejudices that are taken up and improved unto our disadvantage and trouble; for although we have with the joint consent of all our churches, some years since, publicly declared what is the faith which we profess, and the way of the worship of God wherein we walk, and did hope that it would not be looked on as an unseasonable expectation that our confession might have received a Christian, charitable, sedate consideration, before it were condemned, or those that adhere unto it judged as evil-doers for their so doing; yet considering the sad exasperations of the minds of men, though upon occasions wholly foreign to the matter of our faith and profession, we cannot be without some apprehensions that far the greatest part of those who are loudest in their cries for severity against us, have scarce been so faithful to Christian candour and ingenuity, as seriously to examine whether there be in what we believe and practise, a just foundation for that kind of proceeding and

acting towards us, which they so earnestly desire to engage our rulers unto. If for no other reason, then, but to endeavour to call off the thoughts of men from persons, and personal provocations, unto those things which are the pretended foundation of their actings, and with reference whereunto their account must be made at the last day, when other men's real or apprehended miscarriages will give no countenance to theirs, we cannot but judge it a duty incumbent on us, to remind them what the things are which must give construction unto all that in this matter they shall undertake or perform; and whereunto, under all imputations whatever of things of other natures, our comfort, be it what it will, true or false, in all our sufferings that we may be called unto, is resolved. And we do know, that they will one day find themselves under a woful mistake, who suppose that their severity against us will be any farther justified, than there is ground for it in the principles which we profess in the things of God; and this cannot but be evident unto them (if they will give themselves but the liberty of unprejudiced consideration) who know that a relinquishment of those principles would instantly cause all those other pleas and pretences to vanish out of their minds, which at present they only make use of. And therefore, also, shall we not much concern ourselves in any other charge that is laid against us, but only as to what we profess and practise in the ways and worship of God, as knowing that from thence alone, all occasion is taken for them. We shall therefore only briefly declare our sense of them, and then proceed to that which is our real concernment. For there is not any new thing herein under the sun.

In all ages, wherever any way in religion, hath been judged by the most, rightly or otherwise, to be contrary to the mind of God, as by them apprehended, it hath been immediately charged with the guilt of all the evils that fell out in the days of its profession, though evidently they had other causes and occasions. Such was the condition of Christianity in general of old; as is manifest from the apologetical writings of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Arnobius, Cyprian, Lactantius, Minucius Fœlix, Augustine, and others. Upon every occasion of trouble, the common cry was 'Christianos ad Leones.' Such was the condition of the professors

of the Protestant religion, upon the first reformation, throughout the world; under which prejudice and imputation, they are yet forced to suffer the wrath of men in many places. Whatever disadvantages, then, on this account we may be exposed unto, we have no reason to complain or think strange of, it being no other than all men in the like condition in all ages have had to conflict withal; and will have so, whilst sin and darkness continue in the world. To commend our consciences unto God in well doing, is the only means of peace in ourselves, and the whole defensative in reference unto others, which in this cause is left unto us.

Moreover if any who either really make profession of any way in religion, or are generally esteemed so to do, fall into personal crimes and miscarriages, which no way can secure itself against, men justly provoked thereby, have scarce the patience to attend unto any plea for the way itself, or those who peaceably and innocently walk therein, though the charge against it be altogether groundless and unreasonable. Thus the abominations of the Gnostics of old were charged upon the whole body of Christianity; and the unwarrantable zeal of one man in firing a temple in the kingdom of Persia, reflected an imputation of sedition on all the professors of the gospel, to their extirpation out of that empire. But the unrighteousness of this charge is, we hope, evident even to themselves, who would fain make use of it unto our disadvantage; for no society in the world can give security for the deportment of all individuals belonging unto it, according unto the rules of the whole; and if they may be charged with such miscarriages, it were easy to demonstrate, that no community, no profession of men in the world, no order, no way can be acquitted from guilt, or thought meet to have moderation exercised towards it. Besides, we know not in particular, but that all occasions of reflecting upon our societies on this account, have by the goodness of God been prevented; for which we are humbly thankful unto his holy Majesty. But if to accuse be enough to render any men nocent, none can be long innocent. Thyestæan banquets, promiscuous lusts, and incests, must on that ground be thought to be the ends of the primitive assemblies of Christians. If men will take to themselves the liberty of entertaining evil and groundless surmises, it is

impossible for us, or any living, to set bounds to their imaginations. So that we have nothing in this case to do, but to leave the authors of such false and calumnious insinuations unto that reward, which God and their own consciences will not suffer them to lose; and our vindication unto the providence of God, over our present and future deportment. It may be thought of nearer concernment unto us, when the late troubles in these nations are objected, and the remembrance of them renewed unto our prejudice. But whether the frequent and importunate urging of them, since by his majesty's clemency and grace they are put into legal oblivion for ever, do tend unto the composure and settlement of the minds of men, which is certainly the duty of all good subjects to aim at, we leave it unto the consideration of those who are wiser than we, and on whom the care of the peace and welfare of the kingdom is in an especial manner incumbent. For our own parts, we shall only say, that whereas they were neither begun, nor carried on, upon the account of that way in the worship of God which we profess; may the remembrance of them be never so severely revived, we cannot fear any just conclusion from thence, unto a suspicion of troubles of the like nature for the future; as well knowing the absolute freedom of our principles from any such tendency, as well as the providential unravelling of all those interwoven interests and occasions, which individual persons countenanced themselves withal, in their engagements in them.

Magistracy we own, as the ordinance of God, and his majesty as the person set over us by his providence, in the chief and royal administration thereof: in submission unto him, we profess it our duty to regulate our obedience by the laws and customs over which he presides in the government of these nations. So that our practical adherence unto our own avowed principles, is all that in this matter can fall under the most suspicious and charitable surmise. That there is any means of giving such absolute satisfaction concerning future events, which depend on the minds and wills of men, as to leave all suspicion concerning them impossible, we know not; much less to prevent some men's pretending suspicions for ends best known unto themselves. But this we know, that what ways or means soever are warranted, or es-

tablished by the laws of this land, or may be so, and they are such as mankind must content themselves withal, as incapable of farther or greater assurance ; or whatever else may be rationally and justly expected from us ; we have given, and are ready to give security by, against the evils intimated in this charge upon us ; which being the utmost that our duty calls upon us for, we hope we shall not always suffer for being the unhappy objects of some men's groundless jealousies, which for us to remove is altogether impossible, God himself having not appointed any way or means for us to use to that end or purpose.

As then neither we nor others can hinder men from making use of this pretence, for some ends of their own (though we know, as it is used by them, it contributes nothing to public tranquillity, and the composure of the minds of men), so we hope that God will so far in his good time clear up the innocency and sincerity of our intentions, and their suitableness unto our declared principles, that no just occasion of reproach be administered unto them who wait for advantages against us.

And what are we, that public disturbance should be feared from us ? ‘ *Nec pondera rerum, nec momenta sumus.*’ By what way or means, were we never so desirous, could we contribute any thing thereunto ? What designs are we capable of ? What interest have we to pursue ? What assistance to expect or look after ? What title to pretend ? What hopes of success ? What reward of any hazard to be undergone ? We have no form of government, civil or ecclesiastical, to impose on the nation ; lay no pretence unto power to be exercised on the persons of any of his majesty's subjects ; have no expectations from persons or nations, that might induce us to further or promote any sinister aims of other men : the utmost of our aim is but to pass the residue of our pilgrimage in peace, serving God in the way of our devotion : we covet no men's silver or their gold, their places or preferments ; our whole desire is that of Israel of old to their brother Edom ; ‘ *Let us pass, we pray, through the country ; we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells ; we will go by the king's highway, we will not turn to the right hand, nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.*’ May we

thus far prevail, under the protection of God's providence, his majesty's favour, and our own innocency, we have no principles, we shall have no reason, farther to trouble ourselves or others. If it be denied unto us, and we must yet be scattered over the face of the earth, we shall yet pray for the prosperity of his majesty, and the land of our nativity, patiently bearing the indignation of the Lord, against whom we have sinned, and waiting for his salvation.

That which of late is principally urged unto our prejudice, is the prohibition of that way of worship which we desire to walk in, and the establishment of another by law, to whose authority we owe subjection. When this begins once to be pleaded, the real merits of the cause in debate is usually overseen, and the obedience required by law is only insisted on; as though that were grown a civil difference by the interposition of a law, which before was purely religious. This Paul himself found to be one of the most difficult cases he had to contend withal; it was objected unto him, that he taught 'customs which it was not lawful for to do among the Romans;' Acts xvi. 21. All that doctrine which he had to declare, was antecedently in general forbidden by law; it being determined by the Romans, that no worship of God should be admitted amongst them, not established by public authority. And had not the light and truth of Christianity broken through that opposition, it must have lain shut up in darkness to this day. For our parts, we have only this to say, that there is no reason to urge this as a peculiar objection against us, it being the only foundation of all others; and only occasion of the difference about which we treat. Had not a law enjoined the practice of some things in the worship of God, which according unto our present light we cannot assent unto, without ceasing to worship him (for to worship him in our own thoughts, against his mind and will, is to profane his name and worship); had it not forbidden the exercise and discharge of some duties which we account ourselves obliged unto by the authority of God himself, we had had no need to implore the clemency of our governors to relieve us against that severity which we fear. This then we acknowledge; but withal, to state this difference upon its right foundation, do solemnly in all sincerity

protest before God, his holy angels, and all the world, that it is not out of any unwarrantable obstinacy that we are conscious of unto ourselves, nor from any disaffection unto, or dissatisfaction in, the government that God hath set over us; but merely from a sense of that account which we have one day to make before Jesus Christ the judge of all, that we cannot yield that compliance unto the act for uniformity which it requireth of us. The case, then, notwithstanding this prejudice, is still the same; conscience towards God in the things of his own worship, is still and alone concerned; whatever other pretences and reasonings may in this case be made use of (as many are, and ever were in the like cases, and will so be). The whole real cause of that severity which we humbly deprecate, and only reason lying against the indulgence we desire, is our profession and practice in the things that are not of this world, but purely relating to the revelation of the mind and worship of God. Whatever therefore men may plead, pretend, or urge, of another nature, we are so far conscious unto our own integrity, as to be fully satisfied in our minds, that whatever dangers we may be in this matter exposed unto, or whatever we may be called to suffer, it is all merely for believing in God, and worshipping of him, according to what he hath been pleased to reveal of his mind unto us. And as in this case it is not in the power of any of the sons of men to deprive us of that consolation which an apprehension of the truth will afford unto them that sincerely and conscientiously embrace it; so whether any men can commend their consciences to God according to the rules of the blessed gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, in our molestation and trouble, we leave it unto all unprejudiced men to judge. And that we may yet farther remove all grounds of mistake, and obviate all other pretences against us, we shall candidly declare the general principles both of our faith and worship, and then leave our condition, whatever it may be, to the judgment of him, who 'hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness,' of his majesty whom he hath set over us in supreme power, and of all other persons whatever, who have any sense of the terror of the Lord, the account we must make of serving him according to what he is pleased

to reveal of himself unto us, the nature of things known only by divine revelation, or of the infirm frail condition of mankind in this world.

For the faith which we profess, and which we desire to walk according unto, we need not insist upon the particular heads of it, having some years since in our confessions publicly declared it, with the joint consent of all our churches; neither do we own or avow any doctrine, but what is therein asserted and discharged. And we hope it will not be looked upon as an unreasonable request, if we humbly desire, that it may receive a Christian, charitable, sedate consideration, before it be condemned. May we be convinced of any thing therein, not agreeable unto the Scriptures, not taught and revealed in them, we shall be with the first in its rejection. That this hath been by any as yet attempted, we know not; and yet we are judged, censured, and reproached upon the account of it. So far are men degenerated from that frame of spirit, which was in the Christians of old; so far have they relinquished the ways wherein they walked towards those who dissented from them.

Nor do we decline the judgment of the primitive church; being fully satisfied, that what we teach and adhere unto, is as consonant unto the doctrine thereof, as that of any church at this day in the world. The four first general councils, as to what was determined in them in matters of faith, are confirmed by law in this nation; which is all that from antiquity hath any peculiar stamp of authority put upon it amongst us; this also we willingly admit of, and fully assert in our confession. Neither doth the addition of ours disturb the harmony that is in the confessions of the reformed churches, being in all material points the same with them, and no otherwise differing from any of them in things of less importance, than as they do one from another; and as all confessions have done, since the first introduction of their use into the churches of God. That which amongst them is of most special regard and consideration unto us, is that of the church of England, declared in the Articles of religion: and herein in particular, what is purely doctrinal, we fully embrace and constantly adhere unto. And though we shall not compare ourselves with others, in ability to assert, teach, and maintain it; yet we cannot, whilst we are con-

scious unto ourselves of our integrity in our cordial adherence unto it, but bear with regret the clamorous accusations of some against us, for departing from the church of England, who have not given that testimony of their adherence unto its doctrine, which we have done, and by the help of God shall continue to do. It is true, indeed, there are some enlargements in our confession of the things delivered in the thirty-nine Articles; some additions of things not expressly contained in them, which we were necessitated unto, for the full declaration of our minds, and to obviate that obloquy which otherwise we might have been exposed unto, as reserving our judgment in matters that had received great public debate since the composure of those Articles: but yet we are fully persuaded, that there is not any proposition in our whole confession, which is repugnant unto any thing contained in the Articles, or is not by just consequence deducible from them. Neither were we the authors of the explanations or enlargements mentioned; there being nothing contained in them, but what we have learned and been instructed in from the writings of the most famous divines of this nation, bishops and others, ever since the reformation; which being published by legal authority, have been always esteemed, both at home and abroad, faithfully to represent the doctrine of the church of England. We have no new faith to declare, no new doctrine to teach, no private opinions to divulge; no point or truth do we profess, no not one, which hath not been declared, taught, divulged, and esteemed as the common doctrine of the church of England ever since the reformation.

If then we evince not the faith we profess to be consonant unto the Scriptures, the doctrine of the primitive church, of the four first general councils, the confessions of the reformed churches beyond the seas, and that in particular of the church of England, we shall acknowledge the condition of things in reference unto that liberty which we humbly desire, to be otherwise stated than hitherto we have apprehended. But if this be the condition of our profession, as we hope it is manifest unto all unprejudiced and ingenuous persons to be, who esteem it their duty not to judge a matter of so great importance before they hear it, we can hardly think that they give up themselves to the conduct of the

meek and Holy Spirit of Christ, who are ready to breathe out extirpation against us, as to our interest in this world, for the profession of those principles in the things of God, which they pretend to build their own interests upon for another.

The nonconformity then that we may be charged with, being very remote from a dissent unto that doctrine which is here publicly avowed, and confirmed by law, it cannot but seem strange unto us, that any should endeavour to cast us under the same severity with them who utterly renounce it; and would entail upon their posterity, on the forfeiture of all their public rights, as Englishmen, and benefit of their private estates, not only an adherence unto the Protestant religion, but a precise and determinate judgment and practice in things of very little concernment therein; and of none at all, as to public tranquillity.

Would it not seem strange, that a man might at as easy and cheap a rate, renounce the Protestant profession, and the fundamental doctrines of the church of England, in things indispensably necessary to salvation, as to be mistaken, or suspend his assent about things dark and disputable in their own nature, and of very small importance, which way soever they are determined? So that men in the embracing or refusal of them, rebel not against that commanding light of God set up in their hearts to rule them in his name, in that apprehension which they have of the revelation of his will, which is unto them of great and eternal moment.

They are then only things relating unto outward order and worship, wherein our dissent from the present establishment of religion doth consist; things about which there hath been variety of judgment, and difference in practice, from the days of the apostles, and probably will be so until the end of the world: for we find by experience, that the late expedient for the ending of differences about them, by vindicating of them into the arbitrary disposal of every church, or those that preside therein, in whose determinations all persons are to acquiesce; is so far from accomplishing the work whereunto it is designed, that it contributes largely to their increase and perpetuation. Our only guilt then is, our not agreeing with others in those things wherein there never yet was an agreement among Christians: nor, perhaps, had the y

all that frame of spirit in moderation and mutual forbearance which the gospel requireth in them, would it ever be any way needful that there should so be.

For our parts, about these things we judge not other men, nor do, or ever did, seek to impose our apprehensions on their judgments or practice. What in them is agreeable unto truth, God knows, and will one day declare. Unto our present light in the revelation of his will must our practice be conformed; unless to please men, and secure our transitory perishing concernments, we intend to break his bonds and cast away his cords from us.

And that it may the better appear what is both our judgment and practice in and about these things; unto what we have declared in the close of our confession (which we suppose they cannot reasonably and with satisfaction to their own consciences, wholly overlook, who because thereof, are ready to reflect with severe thoughts upon us), we shall now only add the general principles whereunto all that we profess or practise in these things, is resolved. And of them we humbly desire that a Christian and candid consideration may be had: as supposing that to pass a sentence of condemnation against us for our dissent unto any thing, without a previous weighing of the reasons of that dissent, is scarce suitable unto that law whereby we are men, and engaged into civil societies. As then religion is publicly received and established in this nation, there are many outward concernments of it, relating unto persons and things, that are disposed and regulated by and according to the laws thereof: such is that which is called power ecclesiastical, or authority to dispose of those affairs of the church with coercive jurisdiction, which relates to the outward public concernments of it, and the legal interests of men in them. This we acknowledge and own to be vested in the supreme magistrate, the king's majesty, who is the fountain and spring of all jurisdiction in his own kingdoms whatever. No power can be put forth or exercised towards any of his subjects, which in the manner or nature of its exertion hath the force of a law, sentence, or jurisdiction; or which, as to the effect of it, reacheth their bodies, estates, or liberties, but what is derived from him, and binding formally on that sole reason, and no otherwise.

Hence we have no principle in the least seducing us to transgress against any of those laws which in former days were looked on as safe preservatives of the Protestant religion and interest in this nation. Did we assert a foreign power over his majesty's subjects, and claim an obedience from them in some such cases as might at our pleasure be extended to the whole that is due unto him; did we, or any of us, by virtue of any office we hold in the church of God, claim and exercise a jurisdiction over the persons of his majesty's subjects in form and course of law; or did we so much as pretend unto the exercise of any spiritual power that should produce effects on the outward man; we might well fear, lest just offence should be taken against us. But whereas the way wherein we worship God is utterly unconcerned in these things, and we willingly profess the spring of all outward coercive jurisdiction to be in the person of the king's majesty alone, without the least intermixture of any other power of the same kind, directly or by consequence; we cannot but say with confidence, that it will be utterly impossible to convince us, that on this account we are offenders.

For the worship of God and order therein (which is purely spiritual and evangelical), we acknowledge indeed the Lord Jesus Christ to be the only institutor or author of it, and the holy Scripture the only principle revealing, the only rule to judge of it, and to square it by. It is not now our design to plead the truth of this principle, nor yet to clear it from mistakes, or vindicate it from opposition: all which are done elsewhere. Let it be supposed to be an error or mistake, which is the worst that can be supposed of it, we must needs say, that it is an error which hath so much seeming countenance given unto it by innumerable places of Scripture, and by so many testimonies of the ancient and modern doctors of the church, and is every way so free from the production of any consequent of evil importance; that if there be any failure of the minds of men, in and about the things of God, which from a common sense of the frailty of human nature may rationally expect forbearance and pardon from them, who have the happiness to be from all miscarriage, of that kind (if any such there be), this may claim a share and interest among them.

Nor are we able as yet to discern, how any acceptable account can be given to the Lord Jesus, at the last day, of severity against this principle, or those that, otherwise inoffensive, walk according to the light of it.

Moreover, whereas principles true in themselves may in their application unto practice be pressed to give countenance unto that which directly they lead not unto; we have the advantage yet farther particularly to declare, that in the pursuit of it in the worship of God we have no other ordinances or administrations, but what are owned by the law and church of England. Now whatever other occasion may be sought against us (which we pray God not to lay to their charge who delight in such practices), we know full well that we differ in nothing from the whole form of religion established in England, but only in some few things in outward worship, wherein we cannot consent without the renunciation of this principle, of whose falsehood we are not convinced. This being our only crime, if it be a crime, this the only mistake that we are charged with, in the things of God; we yet hope that sober men will not judge it of so high a demerit, as to be offended with our humble desire of indulgence, and a share in that princely favour towards persons of tender consciences, which his majesty hath often declared his inclinations for.

We confess that oftentimes, when such dissents are made a crime, they are quickly esteemed the greatest, yea, almost all that is criminal: but whether such a judgment owes not itself more to passion, prejudice, and private interest, than to right reason, is not hard to determine.

For our parts, as we said before, they are no great things which we desire for ourselves; the utmost of our aim being to pass the remainder of the few days of our pilgrimage in the land of our nativity, serving the Lord according to what he hath been pleased to reveal of his mind and will unto us. And we suppose that those who are forward in suggesting counsels to the contrary, know not well how to countervail the king's damage.

That this our desire is neither unreasonable nor unjust; that it containeth nothing contrary to the will of God, the practice of the church of old, or to the disadvantage of the public tranquillity of these nations: but that all outward

violence and severity on the account of our dissent is destitute of any firm foundation in Scripture, reason, or the present juncture of affairs amongst us, we humbly crave liberty in the farther pursuit of our own just defence, briefly to declare and evidence.

The great fundamental law amongst men, from which all others spring, and whereby they ought to be regulated, is that law of nature, by which they are disposed unto civil society, for the good of the whole and every individual member thereof. And this good being of the greatest importance unto all, doth unspeakably out-balance those inconveniences which may befall any of them through a restriction put upon them by the particular laws and bonds of the society wherein they are engaged. It is impossible, but that sundry persons might honestly improve many things unto their advantage in the increase of their interest in things of this world, were not bounds set unto their endeavours, by the laws of the community whereof they are members. But whereas no security may be obtained that they shall not have their particular limits and concernments broken in upon by a hand of violence and injustice, but in a pursuit of that principle of nature which directs them to the only remedy of that evil in civil society, they are all in general willing to forego their particular advantages, for that which gives them assurance and peace in all that they are, and enjoy besides. All such conveniences, therefore, as consist in the things that are within the power of men, and are inferior to that good and advantage which public society doth afford, the law of nature directing men, and their chiefest good, commands them as occasion requires, to forbear and quit. Nor can any community be established, without obedience unto that command. But of the things that are not within the power of men, there is another reason. If the law of society did require that all men engaging thereunto should be of one stature and form of visage, or should have the same measure of intellectual abilities, or the same conception of all objects of a rational understanding, it were utterly impossible that any community should ever be raised among the sons of men.

As then all inconveniences, yea, and mischiefs relating unto things within the power of men, are to be undergone

and borne with, that are less than the evils which nothing but political societies can prevent for the sake thereof; so the allowance of those differences which are inseparable from the nature of man, as diversified in individuals, and insuperable unto any of their endeavours, is supposed in the principles of its being and constitution. Yea, this is one principle of the law of nature, to which we owe the benefits of human conversation, and administration of justice, that those differences amongst men which unto them are absolutely unavoidable, and therefore in themselves not intrenching upon, nor disannulling the good of the whole (for nature doth not interfere with itself), should be forborn and allowed among them, seeing an endeavour for the extinguishment must irresistably extinguish the community itself, as taking away the main supposal on which it is founded. And in that harmony which by an answerableness of one thing unto another, rising from such differences, doth the chiefest glory and beauty of civil society consist; the several particulars of it also being rendered useful unto the whole thereby. Of this nature are the things concerning which we discourse. They relate, as is confessed, unto things spiritual and supernatural: that the will of God in these things cannot be known but by revelation from himself, all men will acknowledge; and we suppose they will with no less readiness consent, that divine revelation cannot be apprehended or assented unto, but according to the nature and measure of that light, which God is pleased to communicate unto them unto whom such revelation is made: that this light doth so equally affect the minds of all men, or that it is possible it should do so, considering the divers ways and means of its communication, with the different dispositions of them that receive it; that they should all have the same apprehensions of the things proposed unto them, none will judge, but such as take up their profession in these things on custom, prejudice, or interest. It will then hence evidently follow, that men's apprehensions of things spiritual and supernatural, such we mean as have no alliance unto the ingrafted light of nature, are not absolutely under their own power, nor depend on the liberty of their wills, whereunto all law is given. And therefore is the diversity in and about them to be reckoned among these unavoidable differences which are supposed in the law

of civil society, and without which supposal every attempt for any such society, would be destructive of itself. Among these apprehensions, and the exercise of our consciences towards God upon them, lies all the difference from the present establishment, which we desire an indulgence to be shewed towards ; not at all questioning but that it is lawful for them who have attained unto an agreement in them, so far as they have attained, to confirm and strengthen that agreement among themselves, and render it desirable unto others, by all such ways and means as by right and the laws of the society whereof they are, they make use of.

And it is, as we humbly conceive, in vain pretended, that it is not the apprehensions of men's minds, and their consciences unto God upon them, but only their outward actings that fall under the penalties desired by some to be indispensably imposed on dissenters from the established form ; seeing those penalties are not only annexed unto actions which such apprehensions require as duties unto God, but also unto a not acting contrary unto them, which directly and immediately reflect on the mind and conscience itself : other ways to reach the consciences of their brethren, it is utterly impossible to find out. And to teach men that their consciences towards God are not concerned either in not acting according to their light in his worship, or in acting against it, is to teach them to be atheists.

We cannot therefore but hope, that our distance from the present establishment, in some few things relating unto supernatural revelation (especially whilst in our agreement with it there is a salve for all things in the least intrenching on the light of nature, and all things whatever, that even of revelation itself, are necessary to the grand end of it, with security against any thing that may any way incommode public tranquillity), being unto us insuperable, and therefore provided for by the fundamental law of all civil societies, that it will not always receive so severe a construction as to deprive us of the good and benefit thereof. For to annex penalties, which in the progress will deprive men of all those advantages in their outward concernments which public society doth or can afford unto these differences, without a supposition whereof, and a provision for, there could be no such so-

ciety at all, is to destroy that whose good and preservation is intended.

And therefore the different conceptions of the minds of men in the things under consideration, with actings consonant unto them, being not only an unavoidable consequent of nature's constant production of the race of mankind, in that various diversity which in all instances we behold, but also rendered farther insuperable, from the nature of the things themselves about which they are exercised (being of divine revelation), they were ever in the world esteemed without the line of civil coercion and punishment, until it came to be the interest of some to offer violence to those principles of reason in themselves, which any outward alteration in the state of things is capable of rendering their own best protection and defence.

And on these grounds it is, that force never yet attained, or long kept that in religion which it aimed at.

And the great Roman historian tells us, that it is '*indecorum principi attrectare, quod non obtineat*;' no way honourable unto a sovereign prince, to attempt that which will never be accomplished.

But because what may seem obscure in this reason of things, and principles of community (which usually affect them only who, without interest or prejudice, give up themselves to the conduct of rational and sedate consideration, with which sort of persons alone, we have not to deal), is exemplified in the gospel, whose furtherance is on all hands pretended; we shall thence also briefly manifest, that the way pretended for the promotion of its interest, by severity in external penalties, on the account of such differences as we are concerned in, is both opposite unto the spirit of its author, and contrary to the rules of it, with the practice of those who have walked according to them.

As among the many blessed ends of the conversation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, it was not of the least moment, that he might set us a pattern, and give us an example of that frame of heart and holiness of life, whereby we may become like unto our heavenly Father, and be acceptable before him; so in his carrying on of that design, there was not any thing that he more emphatically called upon his

disciples to endeavour a conformity unto him in, than in his meekness, lowliness, gentleness, and tenderness towards all. These he took all occasions for our good to shew forth in himself, and to commend unto others. Whatever provocation he met withal, whatever injurious opposition he was exposed unto, he did not contend, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard with strife or anger. The sins of men, indeed, he reprov'd with all authority; their groundless traditions in the worship of God, he rejected; their errors he refuted by the word; but to the persons of men he was always meek and tender, as coming to save, and not to destroy; to keep alive, and not to kill. In the things of man, he referred all unto the just authority and righteous laws of men; but in the things of God, never gave the least intimation of severity but only in his holy threats of future evil in the world to come, upon men's final impenitency and unbelief. Coerce, fine, imprison, banish, those that apprehend not aright all and every thing that I would have them instructed in, are words that never proceeded out of his holy mouth, things that never entered into his gracious heart. And we are persuaded, that it is a thing of marvellous difficulty, for any man seriously to think, that he who was and is so full of compassion towards all the sons of men, even the worst of them, should ever give the least consent unto the punishment and gradual destruction of those who in sincerity desire to love and obey him, and do yet unavoidably mistake in their apprehensions of some few things, pleaded to be according to his mind, their love and obedience unto him thereby being no whit impeached. When some of his disciples of old, in zeal, as they pretended, unto himself, and the truths preached by him, would have called for fire from heaven on those who had contumeliously slighted him upon a supposed diversity in religion, for which they thought themselves warranted, though falsely, by a precedent out of the Old Testament; he lets them know, that it was an unacquaintedness with their own spirits, causing them to imagine that to be zeal for the truth, which was indeed but self-revenge and private interest, which had caused them to speak so unadvisedly.

Now that the same mind might be in us that was in Jesus Christ, that his example is to be a rule unto us, that we ought all to be baptized into the same Spirit with him; that

what from his frame of heart and actings, as revealed in his word, we can rationally conclude that he would approve or disallow, we ought to square our proceedings and judgments unto, none that own his name can deny.

And if men would not stifle, but suffer themselves to be guided by the power of their convictions, they would quickly perceive how inconsistent with it, are their thoughts of rigour and severity towards those which differ from them in some few things relating to the mind of God in and about his worship.

Certainly this readiness of servants, who are themselves pardoned talents, to fall with violence on their fellows (upon the account of his service, though otherwise it may be poor and despicable in the world) for lesser debts, and those only supposed, not proved real, will appear at the last day not to have been so acceptable unto him, as some men on grounds and pretences, utterly foreign unto this whole business, are willing now to persuade themselves that it is. Would men in these things, which are principally his, and not their own concernments, but as his, labour to be always clothed with his spirit, and do nothing but what they can rationally satisfy themselves that he himself would do in like case; there would be an end not only of this debate, but of many other mischiefs also, which the Christian world is at this present day pestered withal; and it must needs seem strange, that men can persuade themselves that they do that for Christ which they cannot once think or imagine that he would do himself. Certainly, setting aside provocations and prejudices, any man who hath read the gospel, and gives any credit unto it, is a competent judge, whether external force in these things, do more answer the spirit of Christ, or that from which he suffered.

But we have not only his heart and actings for our example, but his word also, as revealed by himself and his apostles, as our rule in his matter.

With nothing more doth it abound, as to our duty in this world, than with precepts for, and exhortation unto, mutual forbearance of one another in our mistakes and failings. And although there be force and light enough, in its general rules, to guide us in all particulars, yet, lest any should imagine that the cause under consideration, about different ap-

prehensions and practices in something relating to the worship of God, might be exempted from them, even that also is variously instanced in, and confirmed by examples approved by himself. The great apostle, who gives us that general rule, that we 'should walk together in one mind,' so far as we have attained, and for other things of difference, wait for the revelation of the mind of God unto them that differ, Phil. iii. 15, 16. everywhere applies his own rule unto the great difference that was in those days, and long after, between the Jewish and Gentile believers. The one continued under a supposal of an obligation to the observation of Mosaical rites and ceremonies, from which the other was instructed that they were set at liberty. This difference, as is the manner among the sons of men, wrought various jealousies between them, with disputes and censurings of each other; whereof the apostle gives us a particular account, especially in his Epistle to the Romans, chap. xiv. xv. Neither did they rest here; but those of the circumcision everywhere kept their assemblies and worship distinct from the congregations of the Gentile believers: hence in most places of note, there were two churches, one of the Jews, and another of the Gentiles, walking at peace in the faith of the gospel, but differing as to some ceremonial observances. The whole society of the apostles, observing their difference, to prevent any evil consequent, in their assembly at Jerusalem, assigned to the several parties their particular bounds, how far they should accommodate themselves unto one another by a mutual condescension; that they might walk in love and peace, as to what remained of difference among them. The Jews are taught by them not to impose their rites and ceremonies on the Gentiles; and the Gentiles to abstain from some things for a season, whereunto their liberty did extend, whereby the other were principally provoked.

Their bounds being so fixed, and their general duty stated, both parties were left at liberty, as to their practice in the thing, wherein they could not yet be reconciled. And in that different practice did they continue for many years, until the occasion of their division was, by the providence of God in the destruction of the Judaical church, utterly taken away.

These were the rules they proceeded by, this their course and practice, who unquestionably under the Lord Jesus were intrusted with supreme authority over the whole church, of that kind which is not transmitted unto any of the sons of men after the ceasing of their office and work, and were guided infallibly in all their determinations. Coercions, restraints, corporal punishments, were far from their thoughts; yea, the very exercise of any ecclesiastical power against them who dissented from what they knew to be truth, so that in general they were sound in the faith, and walked in their lives as became the gospel.

And whereas they sometimes carry the matter to a supposal of disobedience unto those important things which they taught and commanded in the name of their Lord and Master, and thereupon proceeded to denounce threatenings against the disobedient, they expressly disclaim all thoughts of proceeding against them, or any power or warrant from Christ committed unto them, or any others, or that afterwards in his providence should so be, so to do with external carnal force and penalties; avowing their authority over all that was ever to be put forth in things of that nature, to be spiritual, and in a spiritual manner only to be exercised; 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

And because the church might not seem to be disadvantaged by this disclaimer of power externally to coerce such as received not the truth that it embraced, and to be cast into a worse condition than that of the Jews which went before, whose ordinances being carnal were established and vindicated by carnal power, St. Paul lets them know that this alteration is for the better; and the coercion of miscarriages under the gospel, by threatenings of the future judgment which would have a special respect unto them, more weighty than the severest penalties that were appointed by Moses's law; Heb. x. 28—30.

Not that lesser differences in apprehensions of the mind of God in his word, had any punishment assigned unto them under the Old Testament, whose penalties concerned them only who turned away to the worship of any other god but the God of Israel (and such no man pleads for): but that the whole nature of the ordinances and worship of the church being changed from carnal and

earthly to heavenly and spiritual, so also are the laws of rewards and punishments annexed unto them. These were the rules, this the practice in this case, of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: these rules, this practice hath he recorded in his word for our instruction and direction.

Might all those who profess obedience unto his name be prevailed on to regulate their judgments by them, and square their proceedings unto them, the church of God would have peace, and the work of God be effectually carried on in the world as in the days of old. And for our parts, we will never open our mouths to deprecate any severity that may be warranted from the gospel or apostolical direction and practice, against any mistake of that importance in the things of God, as our principles and ways may rationally be supposed to be: for although we are persuaded that what we profess and practise is according unto the mind of Christ, yet because it is our lot and portion to have our governors and rulers otherwise minded, we are contented to be dealt withal so, as the blessed gospel will warrant any to deal with them who are so far in the wrong as we are supposed to be. And if herein we cannot prevail, we shall labour to possess our souls in patience, and to commit our cause to him that judgeth righteously.

This we know, that the judgment and practice of the first churches, after the days of the apostles, was conform to the rules and examples that by them were given unto them. Differences in external rites of worship which were found amongst them, where the substance of faith was preserved, they looked upon as no breach of union at all. A long catalogue of such differences as were from time immemorial amongst them, is given us by Socrates the historian. And he who first disturbed the peace of the churches about them, by dividing their communion (Victor of Rome), is left branded upon record, with the censures of the principal persons for learning and holiness throughout the world in those days. Nor is our dissent from the present establishment of any larger extent, than such as the general consent of all the first churches extended the bond of their communion unto.

Impositions of things indifferent, with subscriptions to precise determinations on points doubtful and ambiguous

with confinements of men's practices in all outward ceremonies and circumstances of worship, were things not born in the world for some hundreds of years after the first planting of churches. Origen, in his third book against Celsus, pleads expressly, that there ever were differences amongst professors of Christianity from the beginning; and that it was impossible but that there should so be, which yet he shews hindered not their faith, love, and obedience. Justin Martyr, in his second Apology, declares his forbearance, and the churches of those days, towards those who, though believing in Christ, yet thought themselves obliged to the observation of Mosaical rites and ceremonies, provided that they did not impose the practice of them upon others. Ignatius, before them, in his epistle to the Philadelphians, professeth, 'that to persecute men on the account of God or religion, is to make ourselves conformable to the heathen that know not God.' Tertullian, Origen, Arnobius, and Lactantius, openly pleaded for a liberty in religion, as founded in the law of nature, and the inconsistency of faith with compulsion, in that extent which we aim not at. The synod of Alexandria, in the case of Athanasius, condemns all external force in religion, and reproached the Arians as the first inventors and promoters of it.

It is indeed pleaded by some, that the Christians of those days had reason to assert this liberty, because there was then no Christian magistrate who might make use of the civil sword in their behalf, or for the punishment of dissenters from them, and that this was the reason of their so doing.

But the dishonesty of this pretence is notorious. They affirm directly, that no force, coercion, or restraint, is to be used in or about the worship of God, nor outward power in a way of penalties to be exercised over the consciences of men herein.

To say they thus pleaded and pretended merely to serve their own present condition and occasion, but that upon the alteration of things they would be otherwise minded, is calumniously to reflect upon those holy witnesses of Christ, the guilt of the highest hypocrisy imaginable: and men cannot invent a more effectual means to cast contempt on all religion, and to root a due sense of it out of the world,

than by fomenting such imaginations. Let them therefore rest in peace under that reputation of holiness and sincerity which they justly deserve, whatever be the issue of things with us, or those which may suffer with us in the like condition.

But neither were they alone; the great Constantine himself, the first Christian magistrate with supreme power, by a public edict declared, 'That the liberty of worship was not to be denied unto any.' And, until the latter end of his reign, there were no thoughts of exercising severity, with reference unto any divisions amongst Christians about the worship of God.

After the rise of the Arian heresy, when the interposition of civil censures upon the account of difference about things spiritual, had made an entrance by the solicitations of some zealous persons for the banishment of Arius, and some of his co-partners, it is not easy to relate what miseries and confusions were brought upon the churches thereby. Imprisonments, banishments, and ruin of churches, make up much of the ecclesiastical history of those days.

After awhile, Arius is recalled from banishment, and Athanasius driven into it. In a short tract of time, Arianism itself got the civil sword in many places, where-with it raged against all the orthodox professors of the Deity of the Son of God, as the synod of Alexandria complains.

Much they suffered in the days of Constantius, unto whom the words of Hilary in this case are worthy consideration: 'Let,' saith he, 'your clemency take care and order, that the presidents of the provinces look to public civil affairs, which alone are committed to them, but not meddle in things of religion.' And again, 'Let your gentleness suffer the people to hear them teaching whom they desire, whom they think well of, whom they choose. God teacheth, rather than by force exacteth, the knowledge of himself; and ascertaining the authority of his commands by works of power, despiseth all compelled confession of him. If force be used to compel men unto the true faith, the bishops that profess it would interpose, and say, God is the God of the whole world, he needs no compelled obedience, nor requires any such confession of him. He is not to be de-

ceived, but to be well pleased. Whence is it, then, that persons are taught how to worship God by bonds and perils?' These are the words of Hilary.

But the same persons suffered more during the reign of Valens, who was dissuaded from cruelty against the Christians by Themistius, a pagan philosopher, on the principles of common reason and honesty; plainly telling him, that by the way he used, he might force some to venerate his imperial robes, but never any one to worship God aright.

But the best emperors in the mean time bewailed those fierce animosities, whereby every sect and party laboured to oppress their adversaries, according as they had obtained an interest in imperial favour, and kept themselves from putting forth their authority against any dissenters in Christian religion, who retained the foundation of the faith in any competent measure. Valentinianus, by public decree, granted liberty of religion unto all Christians, as Sozomen testifies, lib. 6. Ammianus Marcellinus, in his History, observes the same. Gratian made a law that religion should be free to all sorts and sects of Christians, except the Manichees, Eunomians, and Photinians; and that they should have their meetings free; as both Socrates and Sozomen acquaint us.

Neither have they been without their followers in those ages wherein the differences about religion have risen to as great a height as they are capable of in this world.

Nor will posterity be ever able to take off the lasting blot from the honour of Sigismund the emperor, who suffered himself to be imposed upon by the council of Constance, to break his word of safety and liberty, to John Huss and Jerome of Prague.

And what did Charles the Fifth obtain, by filling the world with blood and uproars, for the extirpation of protestantism? Notwithstanding all his victories and successes, which for awhile smiled upon him, his whole design ended in loss and disappointment.

Ferdinand, his brother and successor, made wise by his example, kept constant the peace of the empire, by a constant peace granted to the consciences of men.

His son Maximilian continually professed, that the empire of conscience belonged unto God alone, wherein he would never interpose. And upon the return of Henry the

Third of France out of Poland, he gave him that advice to this purpose, which it had been happy for that prince, if he had understood and followed, before he came to die. But then even he also, having the severe instruction given him of his own experience, left that as his last advice to his counsellors, that they should no more with force interpose in the matters of religion.

Rodulphus, who succeeded Maximilian, by the same means for a long time preserved the peace of the empire. And after he had by the persuasions of some, whose interest it was so to persuade him, interdicted the Protestants in Bohemia the use of their religion, upon the tidings of a defeat given to his forces in Hungary by the Turks, he instantly replied, 'I looked for no other issue, since I invaded the throne of God, imposing on the conscience of men : ' and therefore granted them their former liberty.

Doth not all the world behold the contrary issue of the wars in France, and those in the United Provinces, begun and carried on on the same account? The great Henry of France winding up all the differences thereof, by granting liberty to the Hugonots, laid a firm foundation of the future peace and present greatness of that kingdom. Whereas the cruelty of the duke D'Alva and his successors, implacably pursuing the Netherlands to ruin on the same account, hath ended in the utter loss of sundry provinces, as to the rule and authority that he and they endeavoured absolutely to enthrone, and rendered the rest of them scarce worth the keeping.

The world is full of instances of the like kind.

On the other hand, when by the crafty artifices and carnal interests of some, the principles of external coercion for lesser differences in the matters of Christian religion came to be enthroned, and obtained place in the imperial constitutions and laws of other kingdoms, the main use that was made of it was to drive truth and the purity of the gospel out of the world, and to force all men to centre in a profession and worship, framed to the interest of some few men, who made no small advantage of it.

According as the power and purity of religion decayed, so did this persuasion get ground in the minds of men, until it became almost all the religion that was in the world. That

those who submitted not unto the dictates of them who by various ways obtained a mixture of power, civil and ecclesiastical, into their hands, should be destroyed and rooted out of the earth.

This apostacy from the spirit, principles, rules, and commands of the gospel, this open contradiction to the practice of the apostles, their successors, first churches, best and wisest emperors, attended with the woful consequents that have ensued thereon, in the ruin of souls, proscriptions of the truth, martyrdom of thousands and ten thousands, commotions of nations, and the destruction of many of them, we hope will not be revived in these days of knowledge, and near approach of the Judge of all.

We trust that it will not be thought unequal, if we appeal from the example of the professors of Christianity under its woful degeneracy, unto the first institution and public instance of its profession: especially being encouraged by the judgment, example, and practice of many wise and mighty monarchs in these latter days.

The case is the same as it was of old; no new pretences are made use of, no arguments pleaded, for the introduction of severity, but such as have been pretended at all times by those who were in possession of power, when they had a mind to ruin any that dissented from them.

That the end of their conventicles was for sin and uncleanness; that the permission of them was against the rules of policy, and laws of the empire; that they were seminaries of sedition; that God was displeased with the confusion in religions introduced by them; that errors and misapprehensions of God were nourished in them; that they disturbed the union, peace, and love, that ought to be maintained among mankind; that they proceeded upon principles of pride, singularity, faction, and disobedience unto superiors; was from the first entrance of Christianity into the world, charged on the professors of it.

The same arguments and considerations are constantly still made use of, and insisted on, by all men that intend severity towards them that differ from them.

And they are such as will evidently serve alike any party or persuasion, that in any place, at any time, shall be accompanied with power: and so have been oftener managed in the

hands of error, superstition, and heresy, than of truth and sobriety.

Wherefore the bishop of Rome, observing the unreasonableness of destroying mankind upon such loose principles and pretences as are indifferently suited unto the interest and cause of all who have power to make use of them, because they all suppose the thing in question, namely, that they who enjoyed power, did also enjoy the truth; found out a way to appropriate the whole advantage of them to himself, as having attained the ascription of an infallibility unto him, in determining what is the truth in all things, where men do or may differ about religion or the worship of God.

This being once admitted and established, there seems great force in the foregoing pleas and reasonings; and no great danger in acting suitably unto them, but that the admission of it is more pernicious unto religion, than all the consequents which it pretends to obviate. But where this infallible determination is disclaimed, to proceed unto outward punishment for such conceptions of men's minds and consciences in the things of God, as he is pleased to impart unto them, which may be true and according to his will, upon reasons and pretences, invented originally for the service of error, and made use of for the most part unto that purpose, being more fit for that work than for a contribution of any assistance unto truth, is that which we know not how men can commend their consciences unto God in. Besides, what is it that is aimed at by this external coercion and punishment? that all men may be of one mind in the matter of the worship of God, a thing that never was, nor ever will be by that means effected in this world, for neither is it absolutely possible in itself, neither is the means suited to the procurement of it, so far as it is possible. But when neither the reason of the thing itself will convince, nor the constant experience of so many ages, it is in vain for any to contend withal.

In the mean time we know, that the most of them who agreed together to press for severity against us for dissenting from them, do differ among themselves in the things of far greater importance in the doctrine of the gospel than those are wherein we differ from them; whence it must needs be evident to all what is the ground of their zeal in reference unto us and others.

But all these considerations are quickly in the thoughts of some removed out of the way, by pretences that the indulgence and liberty desired will certainly produce all sorts of evils both in religion itself, and in the civil state, which being mentioned before in general, shall now be a little farther considered ; for this is principally, if not solely pleaded for the refusal and the rejection of them ; neither doth this course of procedure seem to be unwisely fixed upon, by those who suppose it to be their interest to manage their opposition unto such an indulgence, wherein yet we hope they will at length discover their mistake.

For whereas the arguments to be in this case insisted on consist merely in conjectures, jealousies, and suppositions of what may come to pass, none knows when or where, it is easy for any to dilate upon them at their pleasure ; nor is it possible for any to give satisfaction to all that men may conjecture or pretend to fear. Suppose all things that are evil, horrid, pernicious to truth and mankind, and when they are sufficiently aggravated, affirm that they will ensue upon this forbearance, which that all or any of them will so do, no man can tell, and this design is satisfied. But it is sufficiently evident that they are all false or mistaken suppositions, that can give countenance unto these pretences.

For either it must be pretended, that truth and order, which those who make use of these reasonings suppose themselves possessed of, have lost the power and efficacy of preserving themselves, and of preventing the evils summoned up to be represented as the consequents of indulgence without external force and coercion, which they have had sometimes and elsewhere ; or that they indeed have all actually followed and ensued upon such indulgence, in all times and places. The latter of these is so notoriously contradicted by the experience of the whole world, especially of sundry kingdoms and dominions in Europe, as France, Germany, Poland, and others, that it may not hope for admittance with the most obnoxious credulity. For the former, it is most certain that the truth of the gospel did never so prevail in the world, as when there was a full liberty as unto civil punishments granted unto persons to dissent in it and about it.

And if that which is now so called, continueth not to have

the same effect, it may justly be feared that it is not indeed what it is called, or that it is not managed in a due manner. It is then altogether uncertain that upon the indulgences desired, such variety of opinions will ensue as is pretended, and unquestionably certain, that all such as produce practices contrary to civil society, moral honesty, or the light of nature, ought in all instances of them to be restrained. For the conscience of a man can dictate no such thing unto him, there being an inconsistency in them with that supreme light which rules in conscience, whilst it may be so called. And it is a hard thing to ruin multitudes at present sober and honest, lest by not doing so, some one or other may prove brainsick, frantic, or vicious, who also may be easily restrained when they appear so to be.

And moderate liberty will certainly appear to be religious security in this matter, if the power of it, as well as the profession be regarded. For it is the interest of them who plead for indulgence, to watch and contend against error and heresy, no less than theirs by whom it is opposed. For professing all material truths with them, they are not to be supposed to value or esteem them less than they. And it may be, it will appear, that they have endeavoured as much their suppression in the way warranted by the gospel, as those who profess such fears of their increase.

They are Protestants only of whom we speak, and to suppose that they will not do their utmost for the opposing of the rise, growth, or progress of whatever is contrary to that religion which they profess, or that their interest therein is of less concernment unto them than that of others from whom they differ, is but a groundless surmise.

But it is yet farther objected, that indulgence desired hath an inconsistency with public peace and tranquillity, the other head of the general accusation before mentioned. Many fears and suspicions are mustered up, to contribute assistance unto this objection also. For we are in the field of surmises, which is endless and boundless. Unto such as make use of these pretences we can truly say, that might we by any means be convinced of the truth of this suggestion, we should not only desist from our present supplications, but speedily renounce those very principles which necessitate thereunto. For we assuredly know, that no divine truth, nothing really

relating unto the worship of God, can cause or occasion any civil disturbance, unless they arise from corrupt affections in them that profess it, or in them that oppose it. And as we shall labour to free ourselves from them on the one hand, so it is our desire and prayer, that others may do so also on the other, which will give sufficient assurance to tranquillity. But we are moreover wholly freed from any concernment in this objection, in that, he who is undoubtedly the best and most competent judge of what will contribute to the peace of the kingdom, and what is inconsistent therewith, and who is incomparably most concerned in the one or the other, even the king's majesty himself, hath frequently declared his royal intentions for the granting of the indulgence desired, who would never have been induced thereunto, had he not perfectly understood its consistency with the peace and welfare of the kingdom. And as our confidence in those royal declarations hath not hitherto been weakened by the interveniency of so many occasions as have cast us under another condition, so we hope that our peaceable deportment hath in some measure contributed, in the thoughts of prudent men, unto the facilitating of their accomplishment. And as this will be to the lasting renown of his majesty, so it will appear to be the most suitable unto the present state of things in this nation, both with respect unto itself and the nations that are round about us. And we think it our duty to pray, that his majesty may acquire those glories in his reign, which none of his subjects may have cause to mourn for; and such will be the effect of clemency and righteousness.

We find it indeed still pretended, that the allowance of meeting for the worship of God, however ordered and bounded, will be a means to procure and further sedition in the commonwealth, and to advantage men in the pursuit of designs to the disturbance of the kingdom. But it were equal that it should be proved, that those who desire this indulgence have such inclinations and designs, before such pretences be admitted as of any force. For our parts, we expect no liberty, but from his majesty's favour and authority, with the concurrence of the parliament, which when we have obtained (as at no time, whatever our condition be, have we the least thoughts or inclinations into any sedition or public disturbance), so having an obligation upon us in the things

of our greatest interest in this world, we know not from what sort or party of men, more cordial adherence unto and defence of public peace and tranquillity, can justly be expected. For where there are more causes and reasons of compliance and acquiescency, than there are on the contrary, it is rationally to be supposed that they will prevail. And to surmise the acting of multitudes contrary to their own interests, and acknowledged obligation of favour, is to take away all assurance out of human affairs.

Neither is there any colour of sound reason in what is pretended, of the advantage that any may have to promote seditious designs by the meetings of the dissenters pleaded for in the worship of God. For doubtless the public peace will never be hazarded by such designs, whilst they are managed by none, but such as think to promote and carry them on, in assemblies of promiscuous multitudes of men, women, and children; unknown too for the most part unto themselves, and to one another. But these things are spoken because they have been wonted so to be; other considerations to confirm them are none. Conscience, interest, sense of obligations, the only safe rules amongst men to judge by of future events, all plead an expectation of the highest tranquillity in the minds and spirits of men, upon the indulgence desired.

And there lies a ready security, against the pretended fears of the contrivance of sedition in assemblies of men women and children, strangers to one another in a great measure, by commanding all meetings to be disposed in such a way, as that they may be exposed to all, and be under the constant inspection of authority.

As for other courses of severity, with respect to the peace and prosperity of the kingdom, it may not be amiss a little to consider who and what are the dissenters from the present establishment. For the persons themselves, they are mostly of that sort and condition of men in the commonwealth, upon whose industry and endeavours in their several ways and callings, the trade and wealth of the nation doth much depend. And what advantage it will be to the kingdom to break in upon them unto their discouragement, fear, or ruin, we suppose no man can divine. Those who think there are enough for the work without them, and that their exclu-

sion will make room for others, do gratify indeed thereby some particular persons, intent upon their own private advantages, which they would willingly advance in the ruin of their neighbours; but scarce seem to have taken a right measure of the state of the whole. For whereas it may be sometimes, there may in some places be too many of them who manage the affairs of trade and commerce, when their concerns are drawn unto a head, and a readiness for their last exchange that there should be so of those that do dispose and prepare things also, to bring them unto that condition, is impossible. It cannot then be, but that the continuance of so great fears and discouragements upon men, as those which their dissent from the established way of worship doth at present cast upon them, must of necessity weaken the nation, in that part of it wherein its principal strength doth lie. Neither are they a few only who will be found to be concerned in this matter, which is not to be despised. Pliny, a wise counsellor, writing to Trajan, a wise and renowned emperor, about Christians who were then the objects of the public hatred of the world, desires his advice upon the account of their numbers, not that they were to be feared, but unmeet to be punished; unless he intended to lay the empire waste :

‘Visa enim est mihi res digna consultatione, maxime propter periclitantium numerum; multi enim omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis utriusque sexus, etiam vocantur in periculum et vocabantur; neque enim civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est.’

So then they termed Christian religion; for the multitude would still keep the name of truth and religion to themselves: the oppressed, the lesser number must bear the name or title, which they consent or conspire to cast upon them. But the thing itself, as to the persons at present dissenting from the established form, is not unduly expressed. And as it will be an act of royal clemency, and like to the work of God himself, to free at once so great multitudes of all ages, sexes, and conditions, from the fears and dangers of those evils, which they are fully satisfied they do not deserve; so any other way of quitting the governors of this nation, from those uneasy thoughts, which an apprehension of such an effect of their rule upon multitudes

of subjects must needs produce, will be very difficult, if not impossible. Shall the course begun in severity against them, be pursued? What generous spirits employed in the execution of it, can but be weary at last with undoing and ruining families, of those persons, whom they find to live peaceably in subjection to the government of the nation, and usefully amongst their neighbours, merely because they dare not sin against God, in transgressing against that persuasion concerning his will and worship, which he hath given unto them? For they cannot but at last consider, that no man erreth willingly, or believes any thing against his light, or hath other thoughts of God and his worship, than what he apprehends to be from himself; or that any duty is accepted of God, which springs from compulsion. How much more noble and honourable will they discern the work of relieving men sober and peaceable in distress, to be, than to have the complaints, and tears, and ruin of innocent men and their families, continually reflecting themselves on their minds? Nor is there any probability of success in this procedure; for as time hath always made for rule, and encouragements which are solely in the power of rulers have effected great compliance even in things religious; so force and violent prosecution in such cases have been always fruitless. For it is known how much they are disadvantaged as to success, in that the righteousness and equity of their pretended causes are always dubious to unconcerned persons, which makes them think that the true reason of them is other than what is pretended. When they see men whom they apprehend as innocent and guiltless as themselves, as to all the concerns of mankind in this world, pursued with penalties equal unto those that are notoriously criminal, they are greatly inclined unto commiseration towards them; especially if at the interposition of the name and worship of God in the cause, they judge for aught appears to them they fear God and endeavour to please him, at least as well as those by whom they are molested.

And when they farther understand, that those whom they see to suffer such things as they account grievous, and are really ruinous to them and their families, do it for their conscience's sake, it strongly induceth them to believe that it must needs be something good and honest that men choose

so to suffer for them, rather than to forego. For all suffering for religion, they know to be in the power and will of them that suffer, and not of those that inflict penalties upon them; for their religion is their choice, which they may part withal, if they esteem it not worth the hazard wherewith it is attended.

Thus the Roman historian tells us, in the first sufferings of the Christians at Rome. ‘*Quamquam adversus sontes, et novissima exempla meritos*’ (for so he thought) ‘*miseratio oriebatur, tanquam non utilitate publica, sed in sævitiam aliquorum absumerentur.*’

Nor is it a probable way of dealing with the consciences of men, especially of multitudes who are able to give mutual testimony and encouragement to one another. Yea, in such a state of things, dangers of times delight men, and they find a satisfaction, if not an honour, in their miseries, as having sufficient assurance that it is a glorious and blessed thing to suffer things hard and dreadful in the world, when they are conscious to themselves of no guilt or evil. And therefore, as severity hath hitherto got no ground on the minds of men in this matter, no more is it like to do for the future. And if it be proceeded in, it cannot be avoided but that it must be perpetuated from one generation to another, and a sad experiment be made, who will first be wearied, those that inflict penalties, or those that undergo them. And what in the mean time will become of that composure of the spirits of men, that mutual trust, confidence, and assurance, between all sorts of persons, which is the abiding foundation of public peace and prosperity?

Also, what advantages have been made by some neighbour nations, what at present they farther hope for, from that great anxiety which the minds of men are cast into, merely and solely on the account of what they feel or fear, from their dissent unto the public worship, which to themselves is utterly unavoidable, is known to all.

But we have done? and what are we that we should complain of any whom God is pleased to stir up and use for our exercise and trial? We desire in patience and silence to bear his indignation against whom we have sinned, and for what concerns those ways and truths of his, for whose profession we may yet suffer in this world, to approve our con-

sciences unto him, and to leave the event of all unto him, who will one day judge the world in righteousness. We know that we are poor sinful worms of the earth, in ourselves meet for nothing but to be trodden down under the foot of men; but his ways and the purity of his worship are dear unto him, which he will preserve and vindicate from all opposition. In the mean time, as it is our duty to live peaceably with all men in a conscientious subjection unto that authority which he hath set over us, we shall endeavour so to behave ourselves in the pursuit and observance of it, as that 'whereas we may be evil spoken of, as evil doers, men may be ashamed, beholding our good conversation in Christ, and give glory to God in the day of visitation.'

Whatever is ours, whatever is in our power, whatever God hath intrusted us with the disposal of, we willingly resign and give up to the will and commands of our superiors; but as to our minds and consciences in the things of his worship and service, he hath reserved the sovereignty of them unto himself; to him must we give an account of them at the great day; nor can we forego the care of preserving them entire for him, and loyal unto him, without a renunciation of all hopes of acceptance with him, and so render ourselves of all men the most miserable. May we be suffered herein to be faithful unto him, and the everlasting concernments of our own souls, we shall always labour to manifest, that there is no way or means of peace and reconciliation among those who, professing faith in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, yet differ in their apprehensions about sundry things some way or other belonging thereunto, that is appointed by him, and may expect a blessing from him, but we will readily embrace, and, according as we are called, improve to the utmost.

And if herein also our endeavours meet with nothing but contempt and reproach, yet none can hinder us but that we may pour out our souls unto God, for the accomplishment of his blessed and glorious promises concerning that truth, peace, and liberty, which he will give unto his church in his appointed time. For we know, 'That when he shall rise up to the prey, and devour the whole earth with the fire of his jealousy, he will turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with

one consent, that the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, his glory shall be revealed, so that all flesh shall see it together, and then shall all his people receive from him one heart, and one way, that they may fear him for ever, for the good of them and their children after them, by virtue of the everlasting covenant.' And for our own parts, whatever our outward condition be, we know he will perfect that which concerns us, and he will not forsake the work of his own hands, 'because his mercy endureth for ever.'