

INDULGENCE AND TOLERATION

CONSIDERED:

IN

**A LETTER**

UNTO

A PERSON OF HONOUR.

BY

JOHN OWEN

## INDULGENCE AND TOLERATION CONSIDERED.

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SIR,

I HAVE considered the discourses sent me, published lately about Indulgence and Toleration. At their first view, I confess I was not a little surprised with their number, as not understanding the reason of their multiplication at this time, nor what it was that had made them swarm so unseasonably. Upon their perusal, I quickly perceived a defect in them all, which could no other ways be supplied : whether it be so by this means or no, impartial men will judge. The design seems to have been, that what is wanting in them singly in reason, may jointly be made up in noise ; and their respective defects in argument be supplied by their communion in suffrage. It will doubtless be the wisdom of those who are concerned in what they oppose, to stand out of their way, at least until the storm is over.

——— Omnis campis diffugit arator  
Omnis et agricola, ———  
Dum pluit in terris, ut possint sole reducto  
Exercere diem. ———

Their reason will be better attended to, when this earnestness hath a little spent itself ; for men who have attained more than perhaps they ever aimed at, at least than they had just reason to expect, have commonly for a while strong desires to secure their possessions, which time and a due consideration of their title and interest may somewhat calm and allay. In the mean time, because you expect it, I shall give you a brief account of my thoughts concerning the matter treated of by them ; and if that do not too long detain me, of the reasonings also which they make use of. Some things I do much commend their ingenuity in ; for whereas two things were proposed to them, a compliance with some by way of

condescension, and a forbearance of others by way of moderation, they equally declare against them both. They will neither admit others to them, but upon their own terms to the utmost punctilio; nor bear with any in their dissent from them in the least different observances, but all must be alike pursued by law and force, to their ruin. Whether this seem not to be the frame of men's spirits, whose 'fortune and power' (as one of them speaks) 'tempts them to an insolency,' sober and disinterested persons will judge. The minds, I confess, of fortunate men are for the most part equal unto their successes, and what befalls them, they count their due. Nothing else could persuade these men that they alone were to be esteemed Englishmen, and that not only as unto all privileges and advantages attending that title; but so far also, as to desire that all who differ from them should be exterminated from their native soil. It were well if we could see more of their endeavours to merit so high a favour, more of that usefulness and advantage which they bring to the kingdom, that might countenance them in pleading that they alone ought to be in it. For my part, I can see little consistency with Christianity, humanity, or prudence in these resolutions. For certainly, if that be Christian religion which we are taught in the gospel, it inclines men, especially those who are teachers of it (such as the authors of these discourses, at least most of them, seem to be), unto a greater condescension than that expressed upon the causes, and for the ends of its being desired. The request of some for a condescension seem to be no more, but that the rulers of the church would forbear the prescription and imposition of such things on the consciences and practice of men (for it is vain to pretend that conscience is not concerned in practice in the worship of God), as there is not one word about, nor any thing inclining, leading, or directing towards, in the whole Bible, that were never thought of, mentioned, or commanded by Jesus Christ, or his apostles, or any apostolical men; that if they had not unhappily fallen upon the minds of some men to invent, none knows who, nor where, nor when, would have had no concernment in Christian religion.

They indeed who impose them, say they are things in-

different. But the differences that have been almost this hundred years about these things indifferent, is enough to frighten and discourage unbiassed men from having any thing to do with them. And what wise man, methinks, would not at length be contented that these differences and indifferent things may be parted with altogether? Besides, they on whom they are imposed, account them not so : they look upon them as unlawful for them to use and practise (all circumstances considered), at least most of them do so. And they plead by the important argument of their sufferings, that it is merely on the account of conscience that they do not conform unto them. Others think that it is not so ; but I am sure it is possible that it may be so ; and if it be so, they cannot use them without endangering the eternal ruin of their own souls ; though others may speed otherwise in their observances, who have other thoughts and apprehensions of their nature and use. And yet, on the other side, if those that impose these things can make it appear with any probability (I had almost said if they would but pretend) that they were obliged in conscience to impose them, by my consent there should be an end of this strife. But whilst there is this left-handed contest, real will and pretended prudence fighting against conscience and duty, it is like to be untoward and troublesome. And for what end is it that some desire that there might be at least some relaxation as to the present severe impositions of some of the things which are thus contended about ? They say it is merely that they might serve God in the gospel to the good of others, without sinning against him, to the ruin of themselves. They speak particularly unto men who profess it to be their calling, their work, their design, to promote the blessed ends of the gospel towards the souls of men : they desire of them that they may have leave to come and help them in reference unto this end. Nor can it be pretended, that they themselves are sufficient for the work, and that they have no need of the assistance of others : God and men know that this cannot be reasonably pleaded.

And this is a business which, certainly by such men as profess themselves to be guides and rulers of the church, can hardly be justified unto him who is the great Lord of it. When the disciples found some casting out of ' devils in his

name,' they rebuked them, because they 'followed not with them;' a worse and greater nonconformity than that which some are now charged withal; and yet the rebuke of others procured only one to themselves. He said well of old, concerning those who contended to promote common good; ἀγαθὴ δ' ἐρίς ἥδε βροτοῖσι. 'This is a good strife for mortal men:' so is that which is for promoting of the good of the souls of men by the preaching of the gospel; and shall it be forbid for such things,

—— Quæ dicere nolo,

of so little importance are they in this matter, which hath an influence into eternity? What is answered unto this request? Stories are told of things past and gone; scattered interest, dissolved intrigues, buried miscarriages, such as never can have any aspect on the present posture of affairs and minds of men in this nation, are gathered together, and raked out of their graves, to compose mormoes for the affrightment of men from a regard to the ways of peace and moderation: this they enlarge upon with much rhetoric, and some little sophistry; like him of old, of whom it was said, that being charged with other things,

—— Crimina rasis

Librat in antithetis; doctas posuisse figuras

Laudatur. ——

Many inconveniences are pretended, as like to ensue upon such a condescension: but in the mean time men die, and some, it may be, perish for want of that help and instruction in the things of eternity, which there are many ready to give them, whilst it is altogether uncertain whether any one of the pretended inconveniences will ensue or no: I fear whilst men are so engaged in their thoughts about what is good and convenient for them at the present, they do scarce sufficiently ponder what account of their actions they must make hereafter.

But neither is this all that these authors contend for: men are not only denied by them an admission into their societies to preach the gospel, unless it be on such terms as they cannot in conscience admit of, and which others are no way obliged in conscience to impose upon them; but all forbearance of, or indulgence unto them who cannot conform unto the present establishment, is decried and pleaded

against: What though men are peaceable and useful in the commonwealth? What though they are every way sound in the faith, and cordially embrace all the doctrine taught formerly in the church of England? What though those in this condition are many, and such as in whose peace and industry the welfare of the nation is exceedingly concerned? What if they offer to be instructed by any who will take that work upon them, in the things about which their differences are? What if they plead conscience towards God, and that alone, in their dissent, it being evidently against their whole temporal interest? What if they have given evidence of their readiness in the ways of Christ and the gospel, to oppose every error that is either pernicious to the souls of men, or any way of an evil aspect to public peace and tranquillity? All is one, they are neither severally, nor jointly, no one of them, nor all of them, in the judgment of these gentlemen, to be forborn, or to have any indulgence exercised toward them; but laws are to be made and put in execution against them to their ruin, extirpation, and destruction. It may be it will be said, that these things are unduly imposed on them, seeing they press for a prosecution of men by laws and rigour, not for dissenting from what is established, or not practising what is prescribed in the public worship of God, but for practising what is of their own choice therein, in meetings and assemblies of their own; otherwise they may keep their consciences unto themselves without molestation.

But it doth not appear, that this can be justly pleaded in their defence: for as the prohibition of men, under severe and destructive penalties, from that exercise of the worship of God, which is suitable to their light, and which they are convinced that he requires of them, so that in nothing it interfere with the fundamentals of Christian religion or public tranquillity, is as destitute of all foundation in Scripture and reason at all times, and as things may be circumstantiated in prudence or policy, as the enforcing of them to a practical compliance with any mode or way of worship against their light and conscience; so the practice in this latter case hath been more severe amongst us, than in the former. For a testimony hereof, we have those great multitudes, which at this day are excommunicated by the courts

ecclesiastical, merely for their not attending the public assemblies of the nation in their administrations: and as they are by this means, as things now stand, cast, as they say, into the condition of men outlawed and deprived of all privileges of their birthright as Englishmen (of which sort there are forty times more than have been proceeded against unto the same issue in all his majesty's courts of justice in England for many years), so in the pursuit of that sentence, many are cast into prisons, where they lie perishing (sundry being dead in that state already), whilst their families are starved or reduced to the utmost extremity of poverty, for want of those supplies which their industry formerly furnished them withal: and what influence this will have into the state of this nation, time will manifest, if men are not as yet at leisure to consider. The hands that by this means are taken off from labour, the stocks from employment, the minds from contrivances of industry in their own concerns, the poverty that is brought on families, in all which the common good hath no small interest, are not, I fear, sufficiently considered by persons whose fulness and plenty either diverts their thoughts from taking notice of them, or keeps off any impressions on their minds and judgments from what is represented concerning them. Others begin to feel the evil, whose morning they saw not, gathering up towards them, in the decay of their revenues, and entanglements of their estates, which, without timely remedy, will increase upon them, until the breach grow too great for an ordinary healing.

And I am persuaded that none who have been active in these proceedings, will take upon themselves the trouble of confirming this kind of church discipline out of the Scriptures, or examples of the primitive churches, for some hundreds of years.

This, therefore, is that which by these men is pleaded for; namely, that all the Protestants in England, who so dissent from the established forms and modes of worship, as either to absent themselves from their observances, or to attend unto any other way of worship, which being suitable to the principles of that religion which they profess (namely protestantism), they are persuaded is according to the mind of God, and which he requires of them, be proceeded against,

not only with ecclesiastical censures, but also with outward, pecuniary, and corporal punishments, to the depriving of them, in the progress, of their whole liberty, freedom, and benefit of the laws of the land, and in some cases unto death itself; and that no dispensation or relaxation of this severity be countenanced or granted. And herein, I confess, whatever pretences be used, whatever fears and jealousies of events upon a contrary course, or the granting of an indulgence be pleaded, I am not of their minds; nor do I think that any countenance can be given to this severe principle and opinion, either from the Scriptures of the Old or New Testament, or from the example of any who ever endeavoured a conformity unto the rules of them. This is the state of the controversy, as by these authors formed and handled; nor may any thing else be pretended, when such multitudes are ready to give evidence unto it, by what they have suffered and undergone. Do but open the prisons for the relief of those peaceable, honest, industrious, diligent men, who some of them have lain several years in durance, merely in the pursuit of excommunication, and there will be testimony enough given to this state of the controversy.

This being so, pray give me leave to present you with my hasty thoughts, both as to the reasonableness, conscience, and principles of pursuing that course of severity towards dissenters, which I find so many concerned persons to plead for; and also of the way of their arguing and pleas.

And first as unto reason and conscience, I think men had need look well unto the grounds of their actings, in things wherein they proceed against the common consent of mankind, expressed in all instances of the like occasion, that have occurred in the world; which is as great an evidence of the light and law of nature as any can be obtained; for what all men generally consent in, is from the common nature of all. We are not indeed much concerned to inquire after the practice of the heathen in this matter, because, as the apostle testifies, their idolatrous confusion in religion was directly and manifestly against the light of nature; and where the foundation was laid in a transgression of that law, it is no wonder if the proceeding upon it be so also. There was a law amongst the Romans, reported by the orator to be one of those of the twelve tables, forbidding



any to have private gods of their own : but this regarded the gods themselves, the object of their worship, and not the way of worshipping them, which was peculiar and separate to many families and tribes amongst them, and so observed : scarce any family or tribe of note, that had not its special and separate 'sacra.' Besides, they seemed to have little need of any new authorized gods, seeing, as Varro observed, they had of them they owned no less than thirty thousand. And I have often thought that law was imposed on them by the craft and projection of Satan, to keep them off from the knowledge of the true God : for, notwithstanding this law, they admitted into their superstition all sorts of idols, even the folly of Egyptians themselves, as having temples in Rome unto Isis and Serapis. Only this law was pleaded to keep off the knowledge of the true God ; Acts xviii. 13. and of him they had the highest contempt, calling the place of his worship the land

—— Dei incerti, ——

And the custom among the Athenians not to admit any strange objects of worship, any unwarranted devotion, was never made use of, but to oppose the gospel, unless it were when they destroyed the wisest and best man that ever the city bred, for giving some intimation of the true God, and not consenting with the city in opinion about their established devotions : other use of these laws there was none. It is true, when any 'sacra' or superstitious observances were actually used to induce men and women to sin and wickedness, contrary to the light of nature, the very being of civil societies, the Romans severely animadverted upon them : otherwise this law was not made use of, but only against the Jews first, and the Christians afterward ; whereby it was consecrated to the use of idolatry, and rendered unmeet for the church's service or reception.

The Jews were those who were first intrusted with the truth of religion and the worship of God ; and it is known what was their law, their custom, their practice in this matter. Whoever would dwell amongst them, if they owned their fundamentals, they afforded them the blessing and peace of the land. All that they required of such persons, was but the observation of the seven Noachical pre-

cepts, containing the principles of the light of nature, as to the worship of one God, and moral honesty amongst men; whoever would live amongst them of the Gentiles, and took upon themselves the observation of these fundamentals, although they subjected themselves to no instituted ordinances, they called 'proselytes of the gate,' and gave them all liberty and peace. And in those who submitted unto the law of Moses, who knows not what different sects, and opinions, and modes of worship there were amongst them, which they never once supposed that they had any rule to proceed against by external force and coercion.

The case is yet more evidently expressed in the judgment and actings of the first Christians. It will be utterly superfluous to shew how that for three hundred years, there was not any amongst them who entertained thoughts of outward force against those who differed from the most, in the things of Christian religion. It hath been done, I perceive, of late by others. And yet in that space of time, with that principle, the power of religion subdued the world, and brake the force of that law whereby the Romans, through the instigation of Satan, endeavoured with force and cruelty to suppress it. When the empire became Christian, the same principle bare sway. For though there were mutual violences offered by those who differed in great and weighty fundamental truths, as the Homousians and Arians; as to those who, agreeing in the important doctrines of the gospel, took upon themselves a peculiar and separate way of worship and discipline of their own, whereby they were exempt from the common course and discipline of the church then in use, never any thoughts entered into men to give unto them the least disturbance. The kingdom of Egypt alone had at the same time above forty thousand persons, men and women, living in their private and separate way of worship, without the least control from the governors of church or state; yea, with their approbation and encouragement.

So was it all the world over; not to mention the many different observances that were in and amongst the churches themselves, which occasioned not division, much less persecution of one another. And so prevalent is this principle, that notwithstanding all their design for a forcing unto an

uniformity, as their peculiar interest, yet it hath taken place in the church of Rome itself, and doth so to this day. It is known to all, that there is no nation wherein that religion is enthroned, but that there are thousands in it that are allowed their particular ways of worship, and are exempt from the common ordinary jurisdiction of the church.

It seems, therefore, that we are some of the first who ever any where in the world, from the foundation of it, thought of ruining and destroying persons of the same religion with ourselves, merely upon the choice of some peculiar ways of worship in that religion. And it is but reasonable, as was observed, for men to look well to the grounds of what they do, when they act contrary to the principles of the law of nature, expressed in so many instances by the consent of mankind. And I fear all men do not aright consider, what a secret influence into the enervating of political societies such intrenchments on the principles of natural light will assuredly have; for those things which spring up in the minds of men without arguing or consideration from without, will insensibly prevail in them against all law and constitutions to the contrary. It is in vain to turn nature out of doors, it will return. And whence shall we learn what nature inclines unto, unless from the common practice of mankind in all instances, where an evident demonstration may not be given, of the prevalent influence of the interest of some men unto the contrary? Which is,

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*Pessimus diuturnitatis custos.*

It will not always prevail, nor ever at any time without great regret and commotion in the minds of men, who have no concern in that interest.

Consider also the thing itself, of forcing the consciences of men, in manner before expressed; and you will find it so uncouth, as, I am persuaded, you will not know well what to make of it. Learned divines tell us, that conscience is the judgment that a man maketh of himself and his actions, with reference to the future judgment of God; or to that purpose. Now let others do what they will, conscience will still made this judgment, nor can it do otherwise. Whatever men can alter in the outward actings of men's lives, they can alter nothing in the inward constitution of the

nature given it by God in its creation, which refers to its future end. How can this be forced?

It is said, therefore, Let men take this liberty unto themselves: Who forbids them to judge of themselves and of their actions, what they please? None goes about to take this liberty from them.

But is this all? Conscience doth not judge of men and their actions, but with respect unto what in the name of God it requires them to be, or to do. It first requires several things of them in the name of God, and then judges upon their performance, with reference unto the judgment of God. And this is the sovereign dictate of it, Worship God according to that light and understanding which you have, of what is that worship which is acceptable with him, in matter and manner, and no otherwise. If this command be not obeyed, conscience will judge with reference unto the judgment to come. Let conscience then have its liberty for this work, and this difference is at an end.

But it will be said, If conscience must be free as to its first act of directing and commanding, as well as unto its self-judging, it may lead men to all abominations, wickedness, murders, sedition, and filthiness; and so a liberty unto them also must be granted. So I have heard men speak, but I have wondered also that any man that hath a conscience of his own, or knows what conscience is, should give entertainment to so fond an imagination. I would ask any man whether ever he found any such direction in his own conscience, or any inclination that way? nay, if he have not constantly found a severe interdiction given in by his conscience against all such things? And how can he then conceive it possible that the conscience of any man should be of such a make and constitution, seeing naturally it is absolutely the same in all? Besides, as was said, it is a man's judgment of himself in reference to the future judgment of God. And this intimation supposeth, that a man may judge that God at the last day will approve of adultery, murders, seditions and the like evils! which is to suppose all common inbred notions of God to be blotted out of the mind. Nay, it is utterly impossible, as implying a contradiction, that any man should consider God as a judge, as conscience doth always, and suppose his appro-

bation of the evils specified, or of any of the like nature and importance. But men will yet say that conscience hath been pretended for these things. I answer, never by any in their wits. And what any brainsick, or enthusiastic person may say or do in his paroxysms, is not to have any place in considerations of what becomes a guidance of the actions of mankind one towards another. It is true, that some things as they have been circumstantiated, have been debated, even in conscience, whether they have been lawful or no; that is, whether God would approve of them, or condemn them at the last day. But what is evil in itself, and against the light of nature, there is no direction unto it, no approbation of it from conscience in the least. To take away this liberty of conscience in things of its proper cognizance and duty, seems to me to be as much as to say, men shall not judge themselves with reference to the judgment of God to come; which is to put God's great vicegerent out of his place and throne.

Let us now apply this notion of conscience unto the present occasion. There is prescribed a way of divine worship, with ceremonies, forms of prayer, and orders for the administration of sacraments, all things that concern the joint and public worship of God. What is the work or duty of conscience in reference hereunto? Is it not, in the first place, to apply the mind and understanding to consider of what sort it is, in reference unto the future judgment of God? This cannot be denied; the first actings of a man who makes any conscience of what he does, must be of this sort. If then it apprehend it to be such as God will approve of the practice and observation of it at the last day, conscience is satisfied, and reflects no self-condemning thoughts upon its observance. But suppose a man doth not understand it so to be; he cannot conceive it to be appointed so by Christ, nor that any men have warrant, authority, or commission to impose on the practice of others what is not so appointed by him. How shall he do to be otherwise minded? Can he force himself to assent unto that, whereunto in truth he doth not assent? Is it in his power so to do? Ask any man who hath an understanding, whether he can apply it to what he will; that is, to assent or not assent unto what is proposed unto him: all

men will assuredly say, that their assent necessarily followeth the evidence that they have of the truth of any thing, and that otherwise it is not to be obtained. The mind despiseth all violence and coercion from the will; yea, it implies a contradiction that a man should cause himself to assent unto that unto which he doth not assent. Can then other men compel this assent? It is so far otherwise, that God himself will not, yea, be it spoken with reverence of his holiness, cannot, force such an assent, seeing it implies a contradiction; namely, that a man should assent and not assent to the same proposition at the same time. Neither can a man himself force himself, neither can all the men in the world force him, to understand more than he doth understand, or can do so. Men do not seem to have exercised many reflect acts of consideration on themselves, who suppose that they can command their understandings to apprehend what they please, or to assent unto things at their will. These things follow conviction and evidence; and so God himself procures the assent of men unto what he revealeth; and otherwise the understanding is absolutely free from all imposition.

If a man then cannot understand these things to be approved of God, and accepted with him; suppose they are so, yet if a man cannot apprehend them so to be, what is the next work that conscience will apply itself unto? Is it not to declare in the soul, that if it practise these things, God will judge it the last day, and pronounce sentence against him? For conscience, as was said, is a man's judgment of himself and his moral actions, with respect unto the future judgment of God. ' And I am persuaded that this is the condition of thousands, in reference to the present impositions. Their apprehensions and judgments of themselves in this matter, are to them unavoidable and insuperable. It is not in their power to think otherwise than they do, nor to judge otherwise of themselves in reference unto the practice of the things imposed on them, than they do. Neither can all the men in the world force them to think or judge otherwise. If ever light and evidence unto their conviction of the contrary is imparted to them, or do befall them, they will think and judge according to it; in the mean time, they crave that they may not be forced to act

against their light and consciences, and so unavoidably cast themselves into destruction. All then that some desire of others, is, that they would but give them leave to endeavour to please God ; seeing they know it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands as an avenger of sin. God deals not thus with men ; for although he requires them to believe whatever he reveals and proposes as an object of faith, and to obey whatever he commands, yet he gives them sufficient evidence for the one, and warranty of his authority in the other ; and himself alone is judge of what evidence is so sufficient. But men can do neither of these ; they can neither give evidence to their propositions, nor warrant to their authority in their impositions in spiritual things, and yet they exact more than doth God himself. But so it is, when once his throne is invaded, his holiness, wisdom, and clemency are not proposed to be imitated, but a fond abuse of sovereignty alone, is aimed at.

To impose penalties then enforcing men to a compliance and acting in the worship of God, contrary unto what they are convinced in their consciences to be his mind and will, is to endeavour the enforcing of them to reject all respects unto the future judgments of God ; which as it is the highest wickedness in them to do, so hath not God authorized any of the sons of men, by any means to endeavour their compulsion unto it. For the former of these, that men may act in the things of God, contrary unto what they are persuaded he requires of them ; I suppose none will ever attempt to persuade themselves or others. Atheism will be the end of such an endeavour.

The sole question is, Whether God hath authorized, and doth warrant any man, of what sort soever, to compel others to worship and serve him, contrary to the way and manner that they are in their consciences persuaded that he doth accept and approve. God, indeed, where men are in errors and mistakes about his will and worship, would have them taught and instructed, and sendeth out his own light and truth to guide them, as seemeth good unto him.

But to affirm that he hath authorized men to proceed in the way before mentioned, is to say, that he hath set up an authority against himself, and that which may give control to his.

These things being so, seeing men are bound indispensably not to worship God so as they are convinced and persuaded that he will not be worshipped; and to worship him as he hath appointed and commanded, upon the penalty of answering their neglect and contempt hereof with their everlasting condition at the last day; and seeing God hath not warranted or authorized any man to enforce them to act contrary to their light, and that persuasion of his mind and will which he hath given them in their own consciences; nor to punish them for yielding obedience in spiritual things unto the command of God as his mind is by them apprehended; if the things themselves, though mistaken, are such as no way interfere with the common light of nature or reason of mankind, the fundamental articles of Christian religion, moral honesty, civil society, and public tranquillity; especially if in the things wherein men acting, as is supposed, according to their own light and conscience in difference from others, are of small importance, and such as they probably plead are unduly and ungroundedly imposed on their practice, or prohibited unto them, it remains to be considered whether the grounds and ends proposed in exercise of the severity pleaded for, be agreeable to common rules of prudence, or the state and condition of things in this nation.

The ground which men proceed upon in their resolutions for severity, seems to be, that the church and commonwealth may stand upon the same bottom and foundation; that their interest may be every way the same, of the same breadth and length, and to be mutually narrowed or widened by each other.

The interest of the kingdom they would have to stand upon the bottom of uniformity; so that the government of it should, as to the beneficial ends of government, comprehend them only, whom the church compriseth in its uniformity; and so the kingdom's peace, should be extended only unto them, unto whom the church's peace is extended. Thus they say, that the kingdom and the church, or its present order and establishment, are to be like Hypocrates' twins, not only to be born together, and to die together, but to cry and laugh together, and to be equally affected with their mutual concerns. But these things are evident



mistakes in policy, and such as multiplied experience have evidenced so to be. The comparison of monarchy or the fundamental constitution of the policy and government of this nation, with the present church-order, and state, established on a right, mutable and changeable laws; and which have received many alterations, and may at any time when it seems good to the king and parliament, receive more, is expressive of a principle of so evil an aspect towards the solid foundation of the policy of this nation, as undoubtedly those who are principally concerned in it, are obliged not to admit an avowance of. For whereas it is not the gospel in general, nor Christian religion, or religion considered as it best corresponds with the gospel, or the mind of Christ therein, but the present church-order, rule, and policy that is intended; all men know that it is founded in, and stands solely amongst us, on such laws, as is usual with parliaments to enact in one session, and to repeal in another; or at least to enact in one age, and to repeal in another, according as use and experience manifests them to be conducing or obstructing unto public good. And whereas the constitution of the civil government of the nation, is built upon no such alterable and changeable laws, but hath quite another foundation, obnoxious to nothing, but to the all-ouerruling providence of the Most High, it is a great shaking and weakening unto its fixation and interest in the minds of men, to have it compared with things every day alterable at pleasure. And the attempt to plant the kingdom's peace on the foundation of the church's uniformity, which may on a thousand occasions wherein the peace of the kingdom itself is not in the least concerned, be narrowed unto a scantling wholly unproportionate unto such a superstruction, is without doubt as great a mistake in government as any persons can fall into. All the world knows, how full at this day it is of various opinions and practices in things concerning religion; and how unsuccessful the attempts of all sorts have been for their extinguishment. It is no less known, as hath in part already been discoursed, how unavoidable unto men, considering the various allotments of their condition in divine providence, their different apprehensions and persuasions about these things are. He therefore that will build the interest

of a nation on a uniformity of sentiment and practices in these things, had need well fix this floating Delos, if he intend not to have his government continually tossed up and down.

The true civil interest of this nation, in the policy, government, and laws thereof, with the benefits and advantages of them, and the obedience that is due unto them, every Englishman is born unto; he falls into it from the womb; it grows up with him, he is indispensably engaged into it, and holds all his temporal concernments by it. He is able also by natural reason to understand it, so far as in point of duty he is concerned, and is not at liberty to dissent from the community. But as for religion, it is the choice of men, and he that chooseth not his religion, hath none. For although it is not of necessity that a man formally chooses a religion, or one way in religion in an opposition unto, and with the rejection of another, yet it is so that he so chooses in opposition to no religion, and with judgment about it, and approbation of that which he doth embrace, which hath the nature of a voluntary choice.

This being the liberty, this the duty of every man, which is, always hath been, and probably always will be, issued in great variety of persuasions, and different apprehensions, to confine the peace and interest of civil societies unto any one of them, seems scarce suitable unto that prudence which is requisite for the steerage of the present state of things in the world. For my part, I can see no reason the civil state hath to expose its peace unto all those uncertain events which this principle will lead unto. And it seems very strange, and I am persuaded that on due consideration it will seem strange that any should continue in desire of confining the bottom of the nation's interest in its rule and peace, unto that uniformity in religion, which as to a firm foundation in the minds and consciences of men, hath discovered itself to be no more diffused amongst the body of the people, than at present it is, and from which such multitudes do, upon grounds to themselves unconquerable, dissent; resolving to continue so doing, whatever they suffer for it; who yet otherwise unanimously acquiesce in the civil government, and are willing to contribute to the utmost

of their endeavours, in their several places, unto its peace and prosperity.

Whatever therefore be the resolution as to a present procedure, I heartily wish that the principle itself might for the future be cast out of the minds of men ; that the state and rule of the nation, might not by plausible and specious pretences, suited to the interest of some few men, be rendered obnoxious unto impression from the variety of opinions about things religious, which as far as I see, is like to be continued in the world.

Especially ought this consideration, if I mistake not, be applied unto those differences about which alone this discourse is intended; namely, those which are amongst men of the same religion in all the substantials of it, and which having been of long continuance deduced from one age to another, are greatly diffused, and deeply rooted in the minds of men; being such also, as no countenance can be given to act severely towards them, from any thing in the Scriptures, or practice of the first churches in the world.

And I hope it will never more amongst sober and disengaged persons be said or thought, that the interest of England, or of its rule and government, is in any thing confined unto a precise determination of the differences in the minds and consciences of men, so that those who are of one mind in them, and would impose the apprehension and practice of their persuasion upon others, should be alone comprehended therein.

But let the ground of this severity in proceeding against dissenters be never so weak or infirm, yet if the end proposed in it be accomplished, the counsel will appear at last to have been advisable. What then is the end of these things, of this severity so earnestly pressed after, to be engaged into? Suppose the best appearing success that in this case can be supposed, and all that seems to be desired; namely, that by external force and compulsion, men be brought unto an outward conformity in and unto the things that are imposed on them. This is the utmost of what seems to be desired or aimed at. For no man surely is so vain as to imagine that compulsion and penalties are a means suited to persuade or convince the minds of men.

Nay, commonly it is known, that they have a contrary effect, and do exceedingly confirm men in their own persuasions, and into an alienation from the things they are compelled unto.

Suppose then this end to be obtained ; is there better peace or establishment assured to the present church-order thereby, than what it may enjoy whilst men have their liberty to profess their dissent ? Both reason and experience do testify the contrary.

Nor will the church find any more dangerous opponents, upon any emergent occasion, than those who have been compelled to uniformity against their conviction. For bearing their condition always as their burden, they will not be wanting unto an opportunity to ease themselves of it.

And it may be sundry persons now vested with ecclesiastical power, if they would recollect their former thoughts and expressions, might remember that they both conceived and declared their mind to this purpose ; that former severities in the like kind, were unduly and disadvantageously pursued against that strong inclination in so many unto an indulgence and freedom from their impositions, which surely they cannot think to be now lessened or weakened.

But present power is apt to change the minds of men, and make them neither remember what were their former apprehensions, nor foresee what would be their thoughts upon a disappointment in their present undertakings.

But neither yet can this rationally be supposed ; nor is it probable in the least, that the outward conformity intended, will ever be obtained by rigour ; especially where the reasons of it are so remote from the influencing the consciences of men. For whatever arguments may be used for a restraint to be put upon conscience, in things concerning faith and the worship of God, which must be taken from the nature of the things themselves, are utterly superseded and made useless, by the nature of the differences that are in contest between the imposers, and those that deprecate their impositions. For as very little hath been done, especially of late, to prove the lawfulness of the things imposed, nothing at all to assert their necessity ; so the nature of the things themselves, about which the difference is, quite casts them out of the compass and reach of those ar-

guments which are pleaded in the case of coercion and penalties in the things of religion or the worship of God. For if men should be able to prove that heresies and idolatries are to be punished in the persons of them that do assert them; no conclusion will or can be thence made, as I suppose, for their punishment and ruin, who by the confession of them that would punish them, are neither heretics nor idolaters.

Force must stand alone in this case; and what small influence it is like to have on the practices of men, when it hath no pretence to reason or judgment, wherein conscience is concerned to give its countenance, is not uneasy to determine. Nay, experience hath sufficiently in most places baffled this attempt; violence hath been used in matters of religion to the shame and stain of Christianity; and yet never succeeded any where, to extinguish that persuasion and opinion which it was designed to extirpate.

It may be, for awhile indeed, and sometimes it may obtain such success, as to seem to have effected the end aimed at. But still within a short space, mostly in the compass of the same age, it hath been manifest, that it hath but laid in provision for future troubles, oppositions, and animosities.

Let the prelates or rulers, therefore, of the church advise, press unto, and exercise this severity whilst they please. They may as evidently see the issue of it, as if it were already accomplished. Some may be ruined, multitudes provoked, the trade of the nation obstructed, some few be enforced unto an hypocritical compliance with what is against the light of their consciences, compassion be stirred up in the residue of the people for innocent sufferers, and by all indignation against themselves and their ways increased, considering what are the things about which these differences are, how deeply rooted a dissent from the present establishment is in the minds of multitudes; for how long a season that persuasion hath been delivered down unto them, even ever since the first reformation, gradually increasing in its suffrage to this day; the advantages that it hath had for its growth and improvement, with successes evidently suitable unto them; and resolution that men's spirits are raised unto, to suffer and forego the utmost of their earthly concerns, rather than to live and die in an

open rebellion to the commanding light of God in their consciences: it is the utmost vanity to have other expectations of the end of such a course of rigour and prosecution.

In the mean time, I am sure whoever gets by persecution, the king loseth by it.

For what if some officers of ecclesiastical courts have been enriched by the booty they got from dissenters? What advantage is it all this while to the kingdom, when so many families are impoverished, so many ruined, as are by excommunications and imprisonments ensuing thereon, so many more discouraged from the exercise of their faculties, or improvement of their stocks, so many driven beyond the seas; and yet all this nothing, unto what in the same kind must and will ensue, if the course sometimes begun should be pursued? To me it seems that an attempt for the pretended conformity (for attained it will never be), is scarce a due compensation for his majesty's loss in the diminishing of his subjects and their wealth, wherewith it is and will be certainly attended. Besides, to ruin men in all their substantial of body and life, for ceremonies, and those our own countrymen and neighbours, seems to carry with it somewhat of that severity which Englishmen, after the subsiding of the impetuous impressions of provocations, do naturally abhor, and will not long by any means give countenance unto.

On the consideration of these things, and other doubtless of more deep investigation, his majesty hath often declared, not only his resolution to grant the indulgence intimated in his gracious declaration to that purpose, but also the exceeding suitableness of these intentions unto his own inclinations and clemency. The advantages which have already ensued unto the nation, in the expectation of indulgence have been also remembered, and repeated by him with an uncontrollable manifestation of its conducibleness for the future, unto the peace and prosperity of the kingdom. And it seems very strange, that so noble and royal dispositions, such thoughts and counsels of wisdom and authority, such projections of care and solicitude for the kingdom's good, should be all sacrificed to the interest of any one party of men whatsoever.

I cannot but hope, that his majesty will reassume those

blessed counsels of peace ; especially considering that the spirits of men are singularly disposed to receive and put a due valuation upon the execution of them. For all those who desiring an indulgence, though differing amongst themselves in some things, do jointly cast their expectations and desires into a dependance on his majesty, with advice of his parliament.

And as notwithstanding their mutual differences, they are united in this expectation, so may they be made partakers of it. Although in other things their differences continue, they cannot but agree in loyalty and gratitude : when the denial of it unto them, although they still differ in other things, will reconcile their minds in regret against the impositions they jointly undergo.

And, whereas men have by the fears, dangers, and sufferings which they have passed through, evidenced to all the world, that the liberty and freedom of their consciences is of more consideration with them, than all other things whatever ; and have learned themselves also how to esteem and value that liberty, without which they are sensible how miserable their condition is, and is like to be, it is impossible that any strange obligation unto peaceableness, loyalty, and thankfulness, can be put upon the subjects of any nation, than a grant of the indulgence desired would put upon multitudes in this. This would set their minds at liberty from fears and contrivances for the avoidance of impendent dangers ; encourage them to engage the utmost of their endeavours and abilities in the businesses of peace and security, leaving them no fears, but only of any disturbance of the state of things, which hath secured unto them all their principal interests in the world.

And how foolish, senseless, and unbecoming of men, would any other thoughts be ? To think, that men who have given this evidence at least, that they are such as exercise a good conscience towards God and others, in that they have suffered for it, and are ready yet farther so to do, should not despise and contemn all suggestions of unpeaceable dispositions, or should suppose that they have any community of interest with such as being not concerned in conscience with them ; at least not so far as to evidence it to be their chief and principal interest, as theirs it is ; or to have any

inclination to the disturbance of the public tranquillity, wherein all their desires and aims are secured; is to judge by such imaginations of folly, madness, and wickedness, as those who use these pretences, would be loath to be judged by, although they have not given that testimony of their respects unto conscience which the others have done.

And hereby, whereas the parliament have been necessitated through the exigence of the public affairs, to engage the nation in payments not passed through without difficulty, they will, as was said, put a real and effectual obligation upon great multitudes of men, without the least semblance of disadvantage unto any others.

Neither is this a matter of any expense, but only of generous clemency in themselves, and the deposition of wrath, envy, and revenge, in some few others; things that may be parted withal, without the least detriment unto human society. And, as it is in the matter alone of indulgence and conscience, wherein the people are capable of a sensible obligation, others not concerned therein being apt to think that all which is done for them is but their due, and less sometimes than is so; those partakers of it, by an avowment of the favour received, will be in their own minds indispensably bound to promote the common interest of public good.

It is true, indeed, that the parliament have thought meet some years past to direct unto another course of procedure: but, '*Dies diem docet.*'

And wise men are never wont pertinaciously to adhere unto the pursuit of conjectures and projections about future events; such as former laws were suited unto, against experience, and those second thoughts which a new consideration of things may suggest unto them: besides the alterations of affairs in many concernments, may fully justify the alteration in resolutions pleaded for; which is not such neither, as to be contradictory unto any thing already established, but what may be brought into compliance with it, and subordination to it. They may say of what is past, as was by one said of old;

*Res duræ et regni novitas me talia cogunt.*

The present assurance of public peace and tranquillity



admits of counsels impartially tending to the good of all, uninfluenced by a mixture of fears and jealousies.

But suppose the peace and prosperity of the nation to be much secured and advantaged by an indulgence, as undoubtedly under the protection and blessing of God it will be, yet I have heard some say, and it is commonly pleaded, that the church will not be able to keep its station, or to retain its members in compliance; but they will many, if not most of them, make use of the liberty desired, especially if it be for and unto Protestants, which must be prevented. Now this I confess seems strange to me, that any such events should be feared or expected.

Those who make this objection, suppose the church to be really possessed of truth and order in the matters that are in difference; they express every day not only the great sense they have of the learning, ability, and piety of the clergy, but are ready on all occasions to condemn their adversaries, as men unlearned, weak, and inconsiderate. It is also granted, that all outward privileges, encouragements, advantages, promotions, preferments, dignities, public conveniencies, legal maintenance, are still to be confined unto the church, and its conformists; as also that those who desire the benefit of indulgence, must, together with an exemption from all these, pay all dues required by the law to them; and if they will join themselves unto others, besides a deprivation of the great conveniencies of their usual places of assemblies, and their legal interest in them, and the inconveniencies of repairing unto other assemblies, it may be far remote from their habitations, contribute also to the maintenance of their teachers where it is indispensably needed.

If I say, all these and the like considerations, with a reputation of public favour and regard with authority, be not sufficient to preserve and secure the church in its station, and its members in the communion of it, it is evident that they are things which have no foundation in the consciences or minds of men, but stand merely on the props of law and power: which, if true, is yet a secret which ought not to be divulged.

I confess chief-justice Hobart, in his Reports, in the case of Colt and the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, says, 'That though it be *'de jure divino,'* that Christian people

be provided of Christian officers and duties, as of teaching, administration of the sacraments, and the like, and of pastors for that purpose; and therefore to debar them wholly of it, were expressly against the law of God, yet all other things,' as he there shews, 'are not so: for,' saith he, 'we know well that the primitive church in her greatest purity, were but voluntary congregations of believers, submitting themselves to the apostles, and after to other pastors, to whom they did minister of their temporals, as God did move them.' A liberty for which state is pleaded for, the thing itself being owned to be according to the pattern of the primitive church in her greatest purity.

And if it be so as he speaks, all other orders and observances in the church must be built only on law and custom. But yet such is their force also on the minds of men, that as attended with the advantages and conveniences before mentioned, and fenced by the inconveniences and disadvantages which attend dissenters; the differences also contended about being of no more weight than they are, there is no doubt but the most of men, at least to the full as many as without force to conscience, will do so under the severest penalties to the contrary, will continue their adherence to the present church-state, although the liberty of the dissent desired should be indulged.

It may be this suggestion of peace and moderation may not have an equal relish unto all palates, nor find like reception in the minds of all. The interest of some, and the prejudices of others, are so important with them, as that they cannot attend unto impartial reason in this matter. I am persuaded that some have scarce any better or more forcible argument, to satisfy their own minds that they are in the right in religion, than the inclination they find in themselves to hate and persecute them whom they suppose to be in the wrong; or at least that they can no longer believe that to be truth which they profess, than whilst they are willing and ready to destroy with violence that which is contrary unto it. For what is forbore, they suppose must needs be approved; all which are so palpable misapprehensions, as there needs no endeavour to lay them open.

It is far enough from being an evidence of truth in any,

that they are ready to destroy them that are otherwise minded. It is error and superstition, which being conscious of their own weakness are impatient until their contraries are ruined. And never are there such mutual violences in matters of religion, as where the several opposite parties are all of them most grossly erroneous and superstitious.

The Egyptians were of old the scorn and sport of the world for their devotions in general; oxen, apes, crocodiles, garlick, and onions, being some of the best of their deities: and yet about these they had amongst themselves such endless animosities, and mutual persecutions of one another, as can scarcely be paralleled. So he tells us:

*Immortale odium et nunquam sanabile bellum,  
Ardet adhuc ombos et Tentyra; summus utrinque,  
Inde furor vulgo, quod numina vicinorum  
Odit uterque locus.*

And what was the ground and occasion of the quarrel?

*Crocodilon odorat  
Pars hæc, illa pavet saturam serpentibus Ibin.*

Their controversy was about the worship of a crocodile on the one hand, and of a fowl that devoured serpents on the other.

Neither is the difference of much more importance, or managed with much more moderation, which is at this day between the Turks and Persians, about the true successors of Mahomet.

So little reason have men to please themselves with a surmise of being possessed of the truth, by the inclination that they find in themselves to persecute the contrary; seeing such an inclination is an inseparable companion of error and superstition, and is generally heightened to cruelty and revenge, according as men by them are drenched in folly and blindness.

It is yet pretended by some, that such a toleration as will satisfy them that desire it, and secure the public tranquillity, however it may please in the notion of it, will yet be found impracticable when it comes to be examined and instanced.

But it is evident that these pretences must be countenanced by some peculiar consideration of this nation and government thereof, seeing the utmost of what is here desired, is both established and practised in other nations.

The whole of it is plainly exercised in the kingdom of France, where the Protestants paying all duties to the church, sustaining all burdens and offices in the commonwealth equal with others, are freed from ecclesiastical courts, censures, and offices, and all penalties for their dissent, with an allowance for the worship of God in their own assemblies provided by themselves, and known to the magistrates under whose jurisdiction they are; which is the sum of all that is here desired. The like liberty, if I mistake not, is granted to the French and Dutch churches here in England. The United Provinces of the Netherlands have continued in the same practice ever since the reformation; so also hath the kingdom of Poland, where the dissenters are both numerous and divided among themselves. Lutherans are tolerated in the dominions of the Palsgrave, elector of Brandenburg, and landgrave of Hessa: so are Calvinists in many free cities of the empire, in some places of the kingdom of Denmark; and both Lutherans and Calvinists in the sundry principalities in Germany, whose magistrates are of the Romish religion. In the hereditary dominions of the emperor, wherever difference in religion once made an entrance, either a forbearance and toleration is granted and continued, as in Hungary, or the countries themselves have been made utterly waste and desolate, as Bohemia and Moravia, and yet in a great measure continue so to be. The attempts of the duke of Savoy against it have been condemned, detested, and abhorred, by all princes of the same religion with himself, and yet have ended in some tolerable forbearance. It is also known, that the kings of England have by virtue of their power in things ecclesiastical, in all ages as occasion required, and as they saw meet, exempted persons and societies from the common and ordinary course and way of church discipline and inspection.

Certainly, therefore, the unpracticableness of such an indulgence lies in the desires of them whose interest, as they apprehend, is opposite unto it: although it is more probable, that their moderation known and declared in this matter, would give them a greater interest in public esteem and veneration, than by any other ways they are like to obtain. Neither is this at all by wise men to be despised, who

are able to foresee the probable events of continued exasperation. Why then should men pretend, that that cannot be done, which hath been done and is done at this day in so many kingdoms and nations, with the wished-for success by peace and happiness?

And as it may be very few instances can be given of such severity against dissenters, who come up to so full an agreement in all material things with them from whom they dissent, as that of late practised and still pressed for in England; so it will be found, that whether we respect the nature and temper of the people of this land, or the admission of the principles of dissent, with the grounds of them, in multitudes, or the resolution to undergo all difficulties and sufferings, rather than to transgress against the light of their consciences, or their valuation of forbearance above all secular things whatever; there is no nation under heaven wherein such an indulgence or toleration as is desired would be more welcome, useful, acceptable, or more subservient to tranquillity, trade, wealth, and peace.