

SOME CONSIDERATIONS
ABOUT
UNION AMONG PROTESTANTS,
AND THE
PRESERVATION OF THE INTEREST
OF
THE PROTESTANT RELIGION
IN THIS NATION.
BY
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SOME CONSIDERATIONS

ABOUT

UNION AMONG PROTESTANTS,

§c.

1. **T**HE Protestant religion, introduced into this nation, by the apostolical way and means of the holiness and laborious preaching of its professors, confirmed with the martyrdom of multitudes of all sorts, being now thoroughly fixed in the minds of the body of the people, and confirmed unto them by laws and oaths, is become the principal interest of the nation, which cannot be shaken or overthrown, without the ruin of the government, and destruction of the people. Nothing therefore less being included in the attempts of the Papists, with all their interest in Europe, for the reintroducing of their religion amongst us, the nation hath been constantly filled for a hundred years with fears, jealousies, and apprehensions of dangers, to the great disturbance of the government, and disquietment of the subjects; nor can it be otherwise whilst they know that there is a pregnant design for their total subversion, together with the ruin of the Protestant religion in other places, which would have ensued thereon. But,

2. This religion so received and approved by the people, as the only true way to salvation (accompanied with an abhorrency of the superstition, idolatry, and heresies of the church of Rome, partly on the general account of their own nature, and partly on particular reasons and provocations from the attempts of those that belong unto that church, for the ruin of them and their religion), and jointly professed in the same confession of faith, hath been preserved by the means of a faithful laborious ministry, under the care, protection, and outward government of the supreme power, as the greatest bulwark of the Protestant religion in Europe.

3. The only weakness in it, as the interest of the nation (before it was infested with novel opinions), was the differences that have been amongst many of the professors of it, from the very first beginning of the reformation, and which are continued unto this day.

4. These differences, though consisting now in many particulars of less moment, arose originally, solely from the constitution of an authoritative national church-state. For some would have it to be of one sort, namely, episcopal; some of another, namely, presbyterian; some would have it of a divine original, others of a human, which must be the judgment of the king and parliament, who know it to be what they have made it, and nothing else; and some judge it a mere usurpation on the power of the civil government, and the liberties of the people.

5. It is therefore acknowledged that the body of Christian people in this nation, professing the Protestant religion, with a detestation of popery; having the gospel preached unto them, and the sacraments duly administered, under the rule of the king, are the church of England. But as unto an authoritative national church, consisting solely in the power and interest of the clergy, wherein the people, either as Christians, Protestants, or subjects of the kingdom are not concerned, such as is at present established, farther inquiry may be made about it.

6. There is a threefold form of such a church, at present contended for. The first is papal, the second episcopal, and the third presbyterian.

7. The first form of an authoritative national church-state amongst us, as in other places, was papal: and the sole use of it here in England, was to embroil our kings in their government; to oppress the people in their souls, bodies, and estates; and to sell us all, as branded slaves, unto Rome. These things have been sufficiently manifested. But in other places, especially in Germany, whilst otherwise they were all of one religion, in doctrine and worship, all conform to the church of Rome; yet in bloody contests merely about this authoritative church-state, many emperors were ruined, and a hundred set battles fought in the field.

8. At the reformation, this church-state was accommo-

dated (as was supposed) unto the interest of the nation, to obviate the evils suffered from it under the other form, and render it of use unto the religion established. Yet experience manifests that, partly from its constitution, partly from the inclinations of them by whom it is managed, other evils have accompanied or followed it, which, until they are removed, the weakness of the Protestant interest through mutual divisions, will remain among us. And among others, they are these :

(1.) An encroachment on the civil rights and government of the nation, in the courts and jurisdictions pretended to belong or to be annexed unto this church-state over the persons, goods, and liberties of the subjects (yea, in some cases their lives). It is the undoubted right and liberty of the people of this nation, that no actual jurisdiction should be exercised over their persons, estates, or liberties, in a way collateral unto, and independent on, the public's administration of justice unto all, derived from the sovereign power, and executed by known officers, rules, and orders, according unto the laws of the realm. If this be taken from them, all other pretences of securing the liberty and property of the subjects, are of no advantage unto them. For whilst they have justice in legal public courts, duly administered unto them, they may be oppressed and ruined (as many are so every day) by this pretended collateral irregular power and jurisdiction over their persons, goods, and liberties ; from which it seems to be the duty of the parliament to deliver them. And it is the right of the kings of this nation, that no external power over the subjects be exercised but in their name, by virtue of their commission, to be granted and executed according unto the laws of the land. This right of kings, and this liberty of subjects also, are so sacred, as that they ought not to be intrenched on by any pretence of church or religion. For what is of God's own appointment will touch neither of them. But the administration of this jurisdiction, as it is exercised with a side-wind power, distinct, different from, and in some things contrary unto, the public justice of the nation (wherein all the subjects have an equal interest), and by the rules of a law foreign unto that of the kingdom, is a great cause of the continuation of divisions among Protestants, unto the weakening of the interest of religion itself.

(2.) It is accompanied with the prosecution and troubling of peaceable subjects, in their liberties and estates; not for any error in the Christian faith, not for any declension from the Protestant religion or compliance with popery, not for any immoralities, but merely and solely for their non-compliance with, and submission unto, those things which are supposed necessary for the preservation of their church-state, which is of itself altogether unnecessary. For the whole complex of the imposed conformity in canonical obedience, ceremonies, rites, and modes of worship, hath no other end but the sustentation and preservation thereof; being things otherwise, that belong not to Christian religion. This began, this will perpetuate our divisions, which will not be healed whilst it is continued. And whilst the two parties of Papists and Protestants are at this day contending as it were for life, soul, and being (the long-continued design of the former, under various pretences, and by great variety of attempts, being come unto its fatal trial, as unto its issue), it will not be thought meet by wise men, whose entire interest in religion and the liberties of the nation are concerned, in this contest to continue the body of Protestants in divisions, with mutual animosities, and the distrust of multitudes, on such unnecessary occasions.

(3.) Whereas, by virtue of this state and constitution, sundry persons are interested in honours, dignities, power, and wealth, in all which they have an immediate (and not merely legal) dependance on the king, since their separation from the pope; they have constantly made it their business to promote absolute monarchical power, without respect unto the true constitution of the government of this nation, which in sundry instances hath been disadvantageous to kings themselves, as well as an incumbrance to the people in parliament. For although their constitution doth really intrench upon the king's legal power, in the administration of their jurisdiction; yet, to secure their own interests, and to make a seeming compensation for that encroachment, many of them have contended for that absolute power in the king, which he never owned, nor assumed unto himself.

9. The evils and inconveniences of this constitution, of an authoritative national church-state, have been greatly

increased and propagated in this nation, as unto the heightening of divisions among Protestants, by the endeavours that have been to confirm and continue this state in an extraordinary way; such were the oath called, 'et cetera,' and the late oath at Oxford, whereon many sober peaceable Protestant ministers have been troubled, and some utterly ruined; which hath much provoked the indignation of the people against those who occasioned that law, and for whose sake it was enacted; and increased the suspicion that those who manage these things, would have men believe, that their state and rule is as sacred as the crown, or religion itself, unto the great disparagement of them both; which things are effectual engines to expel all peace and union among Protestants.

10. Those who are for the presbyterian form of an authoritative national church-state, do indeed cut off, and cast away most of those things which are the matter of contest between the present dissenting parties, and so make a nearer approach towards a firm union among all Protestants than the other do; yet such an authoritative church-state in that form, is neither proper for, nor possible unto this nation, nor consistent with that pre-eminence of the crown, that liberty of the subjects, and freedom of the consciences of Christians, which are their due. But this being not much among us pretended unto, it need not farther be spoken of.

11. It is evident, therefore, that whilst the evils enumerated are not separated from the present authoritative national church-constitution, but the powers of it are put in execution, and the ends of it pursued, it is altogether vain to expect peace and union among Protestants in England; it neither hath been so, nor ever will be so; fire and fagot will not be able to effect it. Who shall reconcile the endless differences that are, and have been, about the power, courts, and jurisdictions of this church-state, whether they be agreeable unto the laws of the land, and liberty of the subjects? The fixed judgment of many that they have no legal authority at present, nor any power given unto them by the law of the land, whereon they dare not submit unto them, is no less chargeable, dangerous, and pernicious unto them, than are their uncouth vexations and illegal proceedings unto them who are unwillingly forced to submit unto

them. And whatever may be expected, the people of this nation will never be contented that their persons, goods, or liberties, shall be made subject unto any law, but the public royal law of the kingdom administered in legal courts of justice. Who shall undertake that all Christians or Protestants in this nation shall ever submit their consciences and practices to a multitude of impositions no way warranted in the Scriptures? Or how any of the other evils that are the causes of all our divisions shall be removed, cannot easily be declared.

12. If it shall be said that if this authoritative national church-state should be removed, and no other of another form set up in the room of it, or be divested of the powers claimed at present by it, it will be impossible to preserve the Protestant religion amongst us, to keep uniformity in the profession of it, and agreement amongst its professors; it is answered, (1.) Nothing ought to be removed but what is a real cause, or unnecessary occasion at least, of all the deformity and disorder that is amongst us, and is likely so to continue. (2.) That whilst we have a Protestant king and a Protestant parliament, Protestant magistrates and Protestant ministers, with the due care of the nation that they may so continue, and a Protestant confession of faith duly adhered unto, I shall not, under the blessing of the holy Providence, fear the preservation of the Protestant religion and interest in England, without any recourse unto such a church power, as fills all with divisions. This I say is that church of England which is the principal bulwark of the Protestant religion and interest in Europe, namely, a Protestant king, a Protestant parliament, Protestant magistrates, Protestant ministers, a Protestant confession of faith established by law, with the cordial agreement of the body of the people in all these things; esteeming the Protestant religion and its profession their chief interest in this world. To suppose that a few men, having obtained honours, dignities, and revenues unto themselves, exercising a power and authority (highly questionable whether legal or no) unto their own advantage, oppressive unto the people, and by all means perpetuating differences among Protestants, are that church of England, which is justly esteemed the bulwark of the Protestant religion, is a high

and palpable mistake. The church of England, as unto its national interest in the preservation of the Protestant religion, is not only separable from it, but weakened by it. Yea, if there be such a national constitution, as in its own nature, and by the secular advantages which it supplies men withal, inclines them to prefer their own interest above that of the Protestant religion in general, it will always endanger that religion in any nation. For hereon they will judge when they are pressed, on any occasion or circumstance of affairs, that it is better to preserve their own interest, by virtue of some dispensations securing unto them their power and secular advantages, than to venture all by a rigid contest for the Protestant religion.

Nor is it morally possible that ever popery should return into this or any other nation, but under the conduct of such a church-constitution; without this it hath no prevalent engine, but mere force, war, and oppression.

But if the interest of popery can possess this church-state, either by the inclinations of them, or the greater number of them, who have the management of it, or by their dependance, as unto their interest, on the supreme authority; if that happen in any age to give countenance thereunto, the whole nation will quickly be insensibly influenced, and betrayed into popery as it were, they know not how. Hence have been such national conversions to and fro in England, as have been in no other places or countries in the world. For the care of the public's preservation of religion, being, as it is supposed, intrusted in this church-state and the managers of it, if by any means it be possessed by popery, or influenced by a popish prince, the religion of the whole nation will be lost immediately.

For as unto all other ministers who have the immediate guidance of the people, they will suppose that they can do nothing of themselves in this matter, but are only obliged unto the conduct of the church-state itself. And having their station therein alone, and depending thereon, they may easily be either seduced by their interest, or excluded from their duty by the power of that church-state whereunto they are subject. By this means the whole interest of the Protestant religion in this nation as unto its preservation, depends on such a state as being the concernment of a few, and those such as have an especial interest of their

own, distinct from that of the Protestant religion in general, may be easily possessed by popery, and probably would be so, if they should have a popish prince to influence them.

But whereas the people are now possessed and fully persuaded of the truth of Protestant religion, if there be no public machine or engines insensibly to turn about the whole body of them, but they must be dealt withal individually or parochially, it will, as was said, be morally impossible, that ever popery should become the religion of this nation any other way but by the destruction or killing of the present inhabitants.

Allow that the church-state supposed may, in those who have the trust and power of it, be seduced, corrupted, or any way induced or disposed unto the interest of popery, as it may be; it is possible some individual persons may be found, that for the sake of truth, will expose their lives to the stake or otherwise. So did many in the days of queen Mary, though now esteemed by not a few, foolish zealots for their pains. But the body of the people through their various legal relations unto this church-state, deserting the care of their own preservation, by their trust in the conduct thereof, whereunto they are unavoidably compelled, will quickly be inveigled so as not to be able to extricate themselves. But set them at liberty, so as that every parliament, every magistrate, every minister, every good Christian, may judge that the preservation of their religion is their own duty in all their capacities, and popery with all its arts will know neither how to begin, nor how to proceed with them.

If then there were no such church-state as being in the management of a few, is seducible, and not difficult to be possessed by the interest of popery, whereby the whole nation would be at once betrayed; the Protestant religion is now so firmly seated in the minds of the people, so countenanced by law, so esteemed by all to be the principal interest of the nation, that the wit of all the Jesuits of the world, knows not how to attack it, much less endanger it; which if there be need, shall be farther demonstrated.

13. Nor is it a matter of art or difficulty to declare a way for the security of the Protestant religion, with the rights of the government, and liberties of the subjects, with the due freedom of conscience, without any such church-state;

but it is what the principles of religion, common prudence, and the honest interest of the nation do direct unto; as to instance in the things that are most material unto that end:

1. Let a solemn renunciation of popery, suited unto the general principles of the Protestant religion, be established by law, to be made publicly by every person, that is to partake of the rights and privileges already confirmed unto that religion, or which afterward shall be so; to be renewed as occasion shall require.

2. Let there be one solemn stated confession of the Christian Protestant faith, such as is the doctrine of the articles of the church of England, especially as explained in the public authorized writings of the church in the days of queen Elizabeth and king James, before the inroad of novel opinions among us; to be subscribed by all enjoying a public ministry.

3. Let the magistrate assume unto himself the exercise of his just power, in the preservation of the public peace in all instances; in the encouragement and protection of the professors of the Protestant religion; in securing unto all men their legal rights, already granted unto them, in their several places and stations, in the punishment of all crimes cognizable by human judgment; in deposing of men from their enjoyments or privileges, which they hold on any condition, as suppose their orthodox profession of the Protestant religion, if they fail in, or fall from the performance of it; leaving only things purely spiritual and evangelical to the care and power of the churches, and all litigious causes of what sort soever, with the infliction of all outward penalties, unto the determination of the laws of the land; and a great progress will be made towards order and peace amongst us.

4. Yea, these few things in general are only needful thereunto: (1.) Let the king and parliament secure the Protestant religion, as it is the public interest of the nation, against all attempts of the papacy for its destruction, with proper laws, and their due execution. (2.) Let the wisdom and power of the nation in the supreme and subordinate magistrates be exerted, in the rule of all persons and causes, civil and criminal, by one and the same law of the land, in a compliance wherewith the allegiance of the subject unto the king doth consist; without which, government will

never be well fixed on its proper and immoveable basis. (3.) That provision be made for the sedulous preaching of the gospel in all parts and places of the land, or all parochial churches, the care whereof is incumbent on the magistrates. (4.) Let the church be protected in the exercise of its spiritual power, by spiritual means only, as preaching of the word, administration of the sacraments, and the like. Whatever is farther pretended, as necessary unto any of the ends of true religion or its preservation in the nation, is but a cover for the negligence, idleness, and insufficiency of some of the clergy, who would have an outward appearance of effecting that by external force, which themselves by diligent prayer, sedulous preaching of the word, and an exemplary conversation, ought to labour for in the hearts of men.

5. It is evident that hereon all causes of jealousies, animosities, and strifes among the Protestants, would be taken away; all complaints of oppression by courts and jurisdictions, not owned by the people, be prevented; all encroachments on the consciences of men (which are and will be an endless and irreconcilable cause of difference among us) be obviated; all ability to control or disturb the power and privilege of kings in their persons or rule, and all temptations to exalt their power in absoluteness above the law, will be removed; so as that, by the blessing of God, peace and love may be preserved among all true Protestants.

And if there do ensue hereon some variety in outward rites and observations, as there was in all the primitive churches, who pleaded that the unity of faith was commended and not at all impeached by such varieties; yet whilst the same doctrine of truth is preached in all places, the same sacraments only administered, wherein every protestant subject of the nation will be at liberty to join in Protestant Christian worship, and to partake of all church-ordinances, in the outward way, and according unto the outward rites of his own choosing, without the authoritative examination or prohibition of any pretended church-power but what in his own judgment he doth embrace; no inconvenience will follow hereon, unless it be judged such, that the Protestant religion, the liberty of the subjects, and the due freedom of the consciences of men sober and peaceable, will be all preserved.