

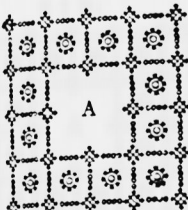
MARYLAND GAZETTE.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1768.

THE NORTH-BRITON, No. LXI.

To the NORTH-BRITON.

S I R,



GREENEABLE to the Promise I made in my last Letter, I shall now proceed to consider the Religious Grievances of the AMERICANS; which, tho' not carried, as yet, to so great a Height as those of a civil Nature, are, nevertheless, as real, and, if allowed to continue, and to operate their full Effect, may perhaps become, in Time, still more intolerable. What I mean, is, the Design that has been formed to introduce into AMERICA, the Episcopal Persuasion, as the established Religion.

This Design, which is now no Secret, has justly excited the Apprehension and Indignation of almost every AMERICAN. They say, and they say it truly, that it was in order to free themselves from the Tyranny and Despotism of the Episcopal Hierarchy, that their Ancestors abandoned their native Country, and took Refuge in the barren Wilds of the Western Continent. And, is it to be supposed, that they will patiently bend their Necks to a Yoke, which neither they nor their Forefathers have been able to bear? Is it to be supposed, that, after having enjoyed, for so long a Time, the Blessings of Religious, and consequently of Civil Liberty, they will tamely forego them without a single Struggle? Those who think so, know not human Nature; for every one that knows it, must be fully satisfied, that there is nothing of which Mankind are so very tenacious as of their religious Principles; and that almost every Attempt to change these Principles, in Opposition to the Humour of the People, has terminated in the Destruction of the Person who made it. Witness the injudicious and ill-timed Attempt of King CHARLES the First to introduce into Scotland the Episcopal Form of Government. For it may be safely affirmed, that, notwithstanding the many rude Encroachments which that Prince had made upon the Civil Rights of his English and his Scottish Subjects, neither of these People would, at least for some Time, have risen in Arms, had it not been for the violent Step, which his Majesty took to change the religious Principles of the latter. This was the true Source of the Civil Wars; and, in the like Circumstances, will ever be the Source of Civil Wars. Nor, indeed, is it at all surprising that it should; for can it be expected, that a People should change their Religion, their Manners, and their Customs, in an Instant, and with the same Rapidity with which a Prince, or his Ministry, may publish the Ordinance that establishes a new Religion?

The Truth is, most Ministers consider the People, as Clay in the Hands of the Potter, which they think they may mould into any Shape they please; but I am afraid, that our present Ministers will find the AMERICANS composed of very different Matter. I am afraid, that, instead of Clay, they will find them composed of Steel, that will break before it will bend, and will perhaps cut the Hand that shall attempt to bend it.

But admitting the Possibility of establishing Episcopacy in AMERICA, such a Scheme, could it actually be executed, ought to be strenuously opposed by every Friend to his Country; as, were it once actually executed, it would certainly be attended with the most pernicious Consequences. It was, I think, a Saying of King JAMES the First, NO BISHOP, NO KING; and, might I take the Freedom of opposing a Maxim of mine to that Royal Chequer of Sentences, I would say, and, I believe, with equal Truth, NO DISSENTER, NO LIBERTY. The DISSENTERS are, and ever have been, the very Life and Soul of the republican Part of our Government. They have often saved it, when upon the Brink of Destruction; and it is to be hoped, they will still save it, if ever it should be again brought to the Brink of Destruction.

The PURITANS, — says a celebrated Historian *, who cannot be supposed partial to that republican Sect — the PURITANS preserved alive the small Sparks of the Love of Liberty that were to be found in the Nation, during the Reign of ELISABETH, and of the Two first Princes of the STUART Line. And, whatever Ridicule may be thrown upon the Puritans, by some Court Sycophants, I must confess, for my own Part, I would rather be a Puritan, attached to Law and Liberty, than a Churchman, attached to Slavery and Despotism: I would rather

be a Puritan, who can sit quietly under his own Vine, and his own Fig-Tree, and none to make him afraid, than a Churchman, who is either employed in ravishing the Vineyards of others; or, who, like Naboth, is in Danger of having his own Vineyard ravished from him.

Accustomed to think freely in religious Matters, the Protestant Dissenters have ever exercised the same Freedom in their political Speculations. They plainly perceived the absurd Nature and pernicious Tendency of the Doctrine of Divine indefeasible hereditary Right, and of Passive Obedience, and Non-resistance; and they accordingly rejected it, with the utmost Indignation. They boldly maintained, that all Government was instituted for the good of the People; that the *Salus Populi* was the *Suprema Lex*; that the Sovereign was only the first Servant to the Public; that the Prince, as well as the Subject, was bound to obey the Laws; that the Moment the Prince violated the Laws, the Subject was, at least in that Instance, freed from the Obedience; and, that if ever the Prince proceeded to such a Length, as to violate the Laws essential to the Constitution, the Subject was entirely freed from his Allegiance.

These are the Principles which the Dissenters have ever embraced, and which they still embrace. These are the Principles, upon which the Civil War was begun, and the Revolution effected. These are the Principles upon which the present Family was established on the Throne, upon which it still possesses it, and upon which alone it can continue to possess it. And, if ever any Minister should be so daringly wicked, as to advise any Prince of that Family, to violate the Principles, he ought to be punished as a Traitor to his King and to his Country.

But, perhaps, it will be said, that these Principles have been always embraced, and with as much Sincerity, by the Episcopalians, as by the Dissenters. If any one should say so, the whole English History would give him the Lie. Were they embraced by them in the Reign of King JAMES the First, who, when, in the Conference of Divines at Hampton-Court, he exalted his own Prerogative and the prelatial Character, was told by the Archbishop of Canterbury, that undoubtedly his Majesty spoke by the special Assistance of God's Spirit? Were they embraced by them in the Reign of King CHARLES the First, whom they wickedly intoxicated with such high Notions of the Royal Prerogative, as precipitated him into Measures that terminated in his own Destruction, and in the Destruction of the Monarchy? Were they embraced by them in the Reign of King CHARLES the Second, to whom they suggested the most arbitrary Councils, and whom they strongly advised to get the Doctrine of Passive Obedience enacted into a Law; and who, when that Prince made a bold, and, unhappily, but too successful an Effort, to reign without Parliaments, so vigorously assisted him in his unconstitutional Measures, that the Historian † already quoted, expressly says; "the Clergy especially were busy in this great Revolution; and being moved, partly by their own Fears, partly by the Insinuations of the Court, they represented all their Antagonists as Sectaries and Republicans, and rejoiced in escaping all those Perils, which they believed to have been hanging over them. Principles, the most opposite to Civil Liberty, were everywhere enforced from the Pulpit, and adopted in numerous Addresses; where the King was flattered in his present Measures, and congratulated on his Escape from Parliaments. Could Words have been depended on, the Nation appeared to be running fast into voluntary Servitude, and seemed even ambitious of resigning into the King's Hands, all the Privileges transmitted to them, through so many Ages, by their gallant Ancestors."

And though they made some Opposition to the violent Measures of King JAMES the Second, yet was it chiefly because their own Order was attacked; for, had that Prince been contented with destroying only the Civil Liberties of the Nation, without endeavouring to undermine its Religion, 'tis more than probable that he might have carried his Point, at least for any Interruption he was likely to have met with from the established Clergy.

True it is, they concurred in the Revolution; but with what Sincerity, the great Number of them who refused to take the Oaths to the New Government, and the endless Plots and Conspiracies they hatched against it, sufficiently declare.

Let it not, however, be imagined, that I mean to impute the above Principles and Practices to the whole Body of the Episcopal Clergy. God forbid! I know there are some of the Episcopal Clergy, who are as staunch Friends to the Liberty of the Subject,

as any Dissenter in the Kingdom: Witness the worthy Author of the Confessional, and several others. I only mean to impute them to the high-flying Jacobite Clergy, and to their deluded Followers among the Laity, who never were, and I believe, never will be thoroughly reconciled to our free Government. I shall begin, I must own, to entertain a Suspicion, that our Government is no longer free.

But though I mean not to impute the above Principles and Practices to the whole Body of the Episcopal Clergy, I may yet, I am persuaded, take upon me to assert, that the Episcopal Form of Church Government is much better adapted, than that of the Presbyterians, or of any other Sect, to an absolute Monarchy; and for the Truth of that Assertion I appeal to the Sentiments of the most sensible Writers, who have treated of Politics. The Distance between the proud Prelate and the poor Curate is almost as great, as that between the Grand Monarch and the meanest of his menial Servants. The Truth is, the Spirit of Subordination that prevails in the Episcopal Form of Church Government, is admirably calculated to preserve Order, or rather Slavery, in Civil Society; for is it to be supposed, that a Man possessed of about Ten Pounds a-Year, will dare to disobey the Orders of one, possessed, perhaps, of as many Thousands?

'Tis an old and just Observation, that Superstition is an Enemy to Civil Liberty, and Enthusiasm a Friend to it. — But it is well known, that the Church of England partakes considerably of the superstitious Character; and that all the Dissenters are more or less, remarkable for Enthusiasm. That this is the natural Tendency of Superstition, will be evident to any one who considers the Situation of France, of Spain, or of any other Roman Catholic Country, where Superstition prevails in its full Force, and where the poor People are held in such a slavish Subjection by their Spiritual and Temporal Rulers, that they are almost looked upon as Beings of an inferior Species. It is commonly reported of a French Bishop, who was a Man of Quality, as most of the French Bishops are, that, thinking it beneath his Dignity to address his Flock in the usual Style, *Mes cheres Freres, or Dearly beloved Brethren*, he began his Sermon thus; *Canaille chetive, ecoutez la Parole de Dieu; Ye Christian Scoundrels, listen to the Word of God!* Such were the Ideas of a due Subordination, with which Superstition inspired this Right Reverend and Honourable Prelate!

But not only is the Episcopal Form of Church Government, an Enemy to Liberty, and a Friend to Slavery, by the strong Mixture of Superstition which it contains, and by the infinite Distinction it makes among the different Members, of which it is composed: It is likewise so, by the great Number of useless Priests with which it is incumbered, by the immense Wealth possessed by these Priests, and by the unequal Distribution of that Wealth among the several Persons belonging to the Priesthood.

The Clergy of Scotland, if I am rightly informed, do not amount to One Thousand. The Clergy of England, I believe, fall not greatly short of Twelve Thousand. — So that, supposing the Clergy to bear the same Proportion to the Laity, in both these Kingdoms, England should contain Twelve Times as many Inhabitants as Scotland. But England, according to the highest Computation, does not contain above Three, or, at most, Four Times as many Inhabitants as Scotland; so that, making allowance for the greater Number of People in the former than in the latter, for every Clergyman in Scotland, there are at least Three, if not Four in England. And, as the Number of Clergy in England, is so much larger than in Scotland, their Revenues, it is well known, are proportionably large. The whole annual Revenue of the Scottish Clergy, does not exceed 80,000 Pounds; a Sum hardly equal to what is possessed by the Bishops alone, and perhaps not One Tenth of what is possessed by the whole Body of the English Clergy. And as the annual Revenue of the English Clergy is so much greater than that of the Scotch, it is divided, it is certain, among the different Members, in a much more unequal and disproportionate Manner. Few Scottish Clergymen have less than Fifty, and few more than a Hundred Pounds a-Year. But, as I hinted above, some English Clergymen have Ten Thousand, and some little more than Ten Pounds a-Year. Such an infinite Difference is there, in the Number of Clergymen, in the Amount of their Revenue, and in the Distribution of that Revenue, between the Episcopal and the Presbyterian Establishments; and so much more favourable is the former, than the latter, to an absolute and pure Monarchy! But as the English Government never was, is not now, and I hope never will be, an absolute and pure Monarchy, so I pray I may never be so unhappy as to live to see the Time when the Episcopal Persuasion shall be extended over the whole British Dominions; for, if ever that Time should

† Hume's Hist. 8vo. Edit. Vol. viii. P. 152.