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THE
INTERESTS
OF THE
Protestant Dissenters
CONSIDERED.

The SECOND EDITION.



L O N D O N :

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The INTERESTS of the Protestant Dissenters consider'd.



It is not unusual with Authors who write the History, or Present State of a Nation, to acquaint us with its *Interests* in regard to its several Neighbours. Thus *Puffendorf*, in his *Introduction to the History of Europe*, treats of the Interests of *France, Spain, England, &c.* in relation to one another, and the several other Kingdoms and States whose Histories he hath abridg'd: And whoever should write an Account of the several *Parties* that are in *Great Britain*, or any other Country, might afford us a very useful Discourse, by stating what their *true Interests* were in respect to one another.

And whoever should go about this Work would find, that, as the true Interests of Nations, so that of Parties *in* Nations, and indeed of the Bulk of private Persons in their private Capacity, is but imperfectly pursued, and very often opposed, by those whose particular Care it should have been to promote it. In private Life the selfish Passions added to the short-sighted Views Men have of Things, carry them aside from their true and real Interest : among Nations, in absolute Monarchies especially, the prevailing Humour and Inclination of the Monarch, or perhaps of his chief Favourite to whom he leaves all the Care of Publick Affairs, determines what shall be the Pursuit of that Nation for *his* Time: and to speak of Parties, they are led away from their true Interests by the groundless *Prejudices* they are apt to conceive of each other, and by the Heat and Zeal of the Bigots amongst them.

In the following short Essay I purpose to shew in general what is the true Interest of Parties both religious and political, applying

plying it particularly to the *Protestant Dissenters*.

First then; in the first place I lay down this as an unalterable Truth, that it is the Interest of all Parties to do *Justice to one another*. This is the same as to Nations in regard one to another; and the same as to private Persons. All Hatred, Animosities, Contests and Wars proceed from the Want of a strict Observance of the Rules of Justice. I do not mean by Justice among Parties, the abstaining only from the higher Acts of Violence and Oppression; but also from the lesser ones of Exclusions and Qualifications, called *Negative Discouragements*, by which one Party finds a Way to debar the other Party of their due Share of the Trusts, Employments, Profits or Honours of the State. Justice is strict in her Nature, admits of no Degrees, not the least Degree of Injury. And he that should touch but the Hair of the Head of another on account of his Way of Worship or Sentiments merely religious, and not prejudicial or relating to the State, is either one who hath not Strength of Reason

Reason sufficient to get the better of some ill Prejudices received in Education, and to discern and know what the natural Rights of Mankind are; or wants such Mastery of his Passions and Humours as is requisite to constitute an *Honest Man*. The *Dissenters*, one would think, should see most clearly the Evidence of this Truth, since being the small Party, and the Party undermost, it is so plainly their Interest as well as Right that it be acknowledged; yet till of late Years through a narrowness and rigidity of Principle they were not universally convinced of it. The *Presbyterians* saw clear enough that they themselves had a Right to a full Liberty of Conscience; but were not so clear that the *Quakers* had; nor that other *Christians*, though in Error, had so too; much less would they extend it to those who were no Christians at all. But now they have learned to know that the Rights of all Men are by Nature equal, whatever their Religion be; that the End for which we become Members of Society, or continue in it, and subject ourselves to the Government of Laws and of Magistrates,

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is not that the Religion of the Majority may be enforced upon the few ; but it is, that our *Persons* and *Properties* may be protected, equally protected from the Violences of one another ; and if from hence, Religion, merely as such, comes at all under the Magistrates Cognizance, it must be to the end that he protect each one in a free Exercise and Enjoyment of that, which each one for himself, and for the time being, not what the Magistrate for him, judges to be the true Religion, and the true and right way of Worship, and what God will require of him ; and that a Religion which teacheth the contrary of this Truth, that is, that teacheth to oppress or molest others on account of their religious Worship or Opinions merely religious, and no ways detrimental to other Men's Rights, may be justly excepted from this Rule of *equal Protection* ; as it doth justly forfeit its Right hereto. But the Dissenters and their Teachers have now so fully declared their Sentiments on this Subject, namely, that they are for universal Liberty of Conscience ; that they cannot now be charged, as in former times, with

with acting against and giving up their true Interest, by allowing of some Principles of Persecution, with an absurd Exception for *themselves only*. Therefore I now pass on, and,

In the next place, next to doing Justice, or perhaps in order to it, it is the Interest of Parties to get rid of the Prejudices and violent Dislike of each other, which designing Men, joining in with the Heat and Fury of the over-bigotted ones, have been able to possess themselves with. The Whigs assume to themselves, as if it were their peculiar Motto, the Words Liberty and Property, and many are made to believe that the opposite Party, the Tories, are not as tenacious of them as themselves: And it may be so, as to the lower sort, the furious Mob, and the High-Church Clergy, and the Jacobite Party among them; but as to the rest, I much doubt whether any one can name one Tory Gentleman in the whole Island, that has a good Estate, and a common Share of Sense, but what would struggle as hard to preserve all those Rights and Liberties

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to his Person, and Securities to his Estate, which our Laws and Constitution give, as could have been expected from him, had he been ever so staunch a Whig. The *High-Church Clergy* did indeed after the Restoration advance a Doctrine entirely inconsistent either with Liberty or Property, I mean that of *Passive Obedience*; and very probably deluded King *James* so far as to have some Reliance on it: But even among them there were those who shew'd by coming into the Revolution, that that Doctrine would not hold them: And the Writers on the High-Church Side have no other Occasions plainly told us, that *Nature will rebel against Principle*; and that we cannot rely on that Doctrine for any extraordinary Submission from the Party. The best Way, one should think, to know the real Sentiments of a Party is to observe the *Laws* that have passed in their Time of Superiority, and that have been promoted by them at other times. It was from the Assistance of the *Tory* Party, though it was not in a *Tory* Parliament, that we obtained the *Triennial Act* in King *William's*

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Time; a Law founded upon the truest Principles of Liberty; for certainly the oftner a Representative is chosen, the more truly and properly is it such; and I am sure it was not a *Tory* Parliament that repealed it. What fitter Law could be contrived to preserve our Constitution, and the Dignity of Parliaments, than that *Act* which requires that every Member have at least 300 *l. per annum* in Land? A Law which gives a publick Leading and Limitation to the Electors to place their Trust in the Hands where it ought to be; and where they would of themselves naturally place it, unless when misguided by unfit Motives; that is, in the Hands where the *fixed* Property is; and are therefore the fittest to watch for its Preservation, and the least capable to be seduced from their Fidelity by other Considerations. And was not this Law framed and passed by a *Tory* Parliament, under a *Tory* Administration, and, I think, without one Negative? To pass now to the other Side, and speak of the false Prejudices which the Tories conceive against the Whigs. One of them is, that they imagine

gine that the Whigs are *Republicans*, and want to set up a Commonwealth: Whereas whoever converseth much with them, will hardly find any one, that hath so much as a Scheme, or just Notion what a real Commonwealth is; and without a Scheme it is impossible to aim at a Commonwealth; because that is aiming at a mere empty Name, without an Idea fixed to it: And those few, if any such there be, as have formed to themselves a Scheme, must have Sense enough to know that no one can set up a *Commonwealth* without having Power enough at the same time to set up *Himself*; and that Self-Interest, in that Case, will always prevail: As *Cromwell*, who could have set up a Commonwealth, and had at times declared he would do so, chose to set up himself instead of it. However, I should think the Whigs might now be fully cleared from any Charge of that kind, since during so long a Course of Time, in which they have been uppermost, there is so little Reason to accuse them of introducing Laws founded on Republican Principles. But I proceed now to

Another political Rule, adapted more especially for the smaller and weaker Parties, which is this; *not to attach themselves immoveably to the Service of any other Party*; but to preserve their *Independency*; and to have always in view the keeping a due *Balance* among the other and greater Parties. For the Friendships among Parties are like the Alliances among States, which are no longer preserved than while one stands in need of the others Help. And when one Party becomes so strong, as not to want the Assistance of their lesser Allies, they will not treat them any longer with the Regard that is due to Friends. 'Tis dangerous therefore for the smaller Party to aid their Friends so much; as till their Friends want their Help no longer; as likewise it is sometimes advisable to forbear aiding them, that they may be put upon observing the Use they are of to them, and thence be induced to make suitable Returns. And there is another Inconvenience attending the lesser Party's making these defensive and offensive Alliances with a greater

ter one, in that by so doing they draw upon themselves the Dislike and Hatred of powerful Adversaries. It is a Mistake of the *Dissenters* to imagine that the Dislike of the Tories towards them is merely on account of their *tender Consciences*: far from it; one cannot but love the *Exactness* of the scrupulous Man, and very readily excuse what seems superfluous Care and needless Caution; provided his Scrupulousness doth really proceed from the tender Temper of his Mind, and the Strictness of his Virtue, and is therefore uniform in all his Commerce with the World, and throughout the whole Conduct of his Life. But the Dislike of the Tories is greatly heighten'd by this, that the Dissenters are always a dead Weight against them at the *Elections*: They appear to a Man, so strictly, one would think they were to be shot for Desertion, if absent. The Dissenters may probably find, that they have reason to blame their own Conduct, in not observing the Rule here laid down, and must feel the Consequence till an Opportunity offers of acting by a better Policy, that is, by the Rule of Policy above advanced.

vanced. I will here add one thing, that this seems to be the most seasonable time, if it be ever possible, to moderate the Dislike that the Tories have of the Dissenters; since the Dispute and Controversy of this Age is not, as formerly, about Rites and Ceremonies, all that is ceased, out of Date, and esteemed trifling; but now the Controversy on Foot is about the Foundations and Truth of Christianity itself; in which the Dissenting Writers, greatly to their Honour, stand among the ablest and fairest Champions.

I would here mention what relates only to some of the Dissenters, in which I hope to give no Offence to any of their Clergy; for I am sure I mean none; but think them as learned a Body of Divines in Proportion to their Number, and of as charitable a Temper, and of as exemplary Lives, as any in the World; but yet, I don't know how it is, They are not all of them the best Advisers for the Interests of their Party; and perhaps may not prove so on the Occasion I have now in View. However the Dissenters have no
reason

reason to be concerned that their Teachers bear this Character of the *Children of Light*, that they are not so *wise in their Generation*, nor always so good Advisers for their Temporal and Political Concerns, as some others may be. We see that the *Quakers*, who have no Clergy, manage their Interests better; and tho' they be but a small Party, with what ease did they obtain a Law, that their *solemn Declaration* in many Cases should be equal to other Men's *Oaths*.

And now I come to take Notice of the present great *Complaint* of the Dissenters. They think it very hard that, tho' it is allow'd that they are universally and most zealously well affected to the Protestant Settlement in his Majesty's Illustrious House, they should be forced to bear a peculiar and very irritating Mark of *Distinction* and *Disgrace*, by being incapacitated for any Trusts and Employments in the Government. But where can they more justly lay the Blame, than on their own *weak* Conduct? They have attached themselves to the Whigs ever since the Revolution
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with so strict an Adherence as if they did not take themselves to be a *Free Party*. No wonder then that the Whigs think that they can rely upon having their Service, however they treat them. Upon how small a Motive therefore did their *Dear Friends*, the Whigs, consent to and bring upon them the *Occasional Bill* in Queen *Anne's* Time? And that was the first and leading Step taken against the Dissenters in the four last memorable Years of her Reign, and that was afterwards followed with another by the *Schism Act*, which perhaps might never have been thought of, or at least not push'd for so soon, had not the first Step been then already got over by the Consent and Management of the Whigs: And with what Slowness and Delay, and after how much Sollicitation did they repeal either of these Acts, when it was in their Power? It would be therefore very imprudent in the Dissenters, at this time, to apply to any Ministers of State to desire Relief; not only because no one ought to ask or receive a Piece of Justice as a Favour; but also because having deviated so long from

from the Rule of Policy above laid down, it will be believed that they may in great measure be prevailed on still to deviate from it; and therefore could expect to receive no other Answer than, that, *this is not a proper Time: Another Day and Time it may be done: My Heart is in it:* or the like. But the Advice I would give to the Dissenters is this, namely, at the next Election of Members of Parliament to TARRY AT HOME, to make that Time of *Agitation* and *Contest* to be unto themselves a Time of *Rest* and of *Peace*; for sure they, who by sad Experience find that they have *no Friends*, should in Prudence make as few Enemies as possible.

I might urge to the Dissenters the Fiteness of the Conduct I have recommended from a more generous Principle, than merely that of their own Party-Interest; since it is the Interest of all the Lovers of Liberty in general, that all Restraints and Discouragements from a free Enquiry, and *Free Choice* in Matters of Religion be removed. And this that I have recommended is the ONLY Method, and the Method

rhod that *must* at length *prevail* with those who have it in their Power to remove them. Hence a right Behaviour of the Dissenters on this Occasion is an extended Concern and a common Cause. And this brings me now to say who they be, that are the real *Friends* of the Dissenters. Though they be few in Number, yet are they not inconsiderable in Weight; but are not found among Parties, merely as a Party, and very seldom among Ministers of State; but are to be found among such *Gentlemen* as have unto good Parts and Knowledge join'd a *Freedom of Thought* and free Enquiry into Matters of Religion. These are Friends to the Dissenters not from any Similitude of having the same Scruples with them; but from considering them as a Party engaged in Interest to be for *Liberty*; and from whom they very reasonably *expect* their best Endeavours to root up and extirpate the *evil Spirit* of Persecution from amongst us; but if the Dissenters should fail their Expectation herein, and shew themselves capable of being cajol'd into a Belief, that there can be a *Time improper* to do Justice

stice or remove Oppression, then, after that, they must be considered as a Party *useless* to such an End : And thus the *Dissenters* might lose the *best Friends* they have.

I WILL conclude with adding a political Observation concerning *Treaties* between Nations, which is very applicable to *Agreements* between Parties and with Great Men. The great *Secret* with the skilful in that Affair, is often no more than this ; to propose such Articles as are in themselves equal and reasonable, and then to contrive it so, that the other Nation with whom they treat shall be to *perform first* ; so that if they shall find it for their purpose afterwards to perform their own Part, then to be sure they will boast loudly of their nice Honour in Observance of *Treaties* ; but if they shall think it more for their Interest to decline the Performance, then they will value themselves as *consummate Politicians* in having made a *ridiculous Cully* of the other. Now, if the *Dissenters* should agree to continue in the Service of the Whigs upon *Promises* (tho' never so solemn) of treating them in
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 a *future Time* more like Friends than they have hitherto done, that is, at a *Time* when they shall not want their Help and Service; and shall be secure from any Resentment on failure of Promise till seven Years after; this, I say, would be falling into that silly Snare of *performing first*. But if, on the contrary, the Whigs, in this Case, should perform first, and *now* make the Dissenters some Recompence for the forty Years Service they have received from them, they might safely rely on having the Returns of an hearty Assistance; since Experience shews that the Dissenters are not hasty in quitting those whom they have been accustomed to call their Friends, tho' they be such as treat them with Neglect; and much less could they be supposed to do it, when more firmly tied, by having newly received an Obligation.

F I N I S.

ERRATUM.

Page 8. line 12. for *themselves* read *them*.

