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Some Free Thoughts

Upon the Account of the

Proceedings of Both HOUSES,

Relating to the

CONFORMITY-BILL

Last SESSIONS.

Humbly shewing an Expedient

How it might probably have been made more Serviceable
to the True Interest of the Church of England.

HER Majesty's most Religious Proclamation, *For the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for the preventing and punishing of Vice, Profaneness and Immorality*; Issued forth by the Advice of Her Privy Council, Feb. 25, 1702. About the Time of the Conclusion of the last Session of Parliament; wherein She takes Notice, That *the Laws against Profaneness, mention'd in Her former Pious Proclamation, (on Her Accession to the Throne) had not been Executed according to Her Majesties Just Expectations and Demands,* should be here Transcribed at Large, as a most proper Introduction to the following Expedient: But, It being Order'd to be Solemnly Read in all Publick Meetings of the Magistracy, as well as Four Times a Year in all Churches and Chappels; it may reasonably be presum'd, none can be Ignorant of it, and of the very Weighty Considerations on which it is Grounded.

Pursuant therefore to the Designs of that Excellent Proclamation, and in Compliance with Her Truly Christian Majesty's *most hearty Desire, That Religion, Piety, and Good Manners may Flourish and Increase under Her Administration and Government*; (which we have all Reason to Pray to God, to continue long a Blessing to these Kingdoms) It is humbly Suppos'd, that a Clause might fitly have been added to the Celebrated Bill, *For preventing Occasional Conformity,* to this Effect,

“ And, *whereas several Persons of Profane*
“ and Atheistical Principles, and of Vicious

“ and Debauched Lives, do sometimes *Join*
“ *with the Good and Pious Members of the*
“ *Church of England, in Receiving the Holy*
“ *Sacrament of the Lords Supper, only to*
“ *Qualifie themselves to Have and Enjoy*
“ *dry Offices and Employments; and yet after-*
“ *wards Persist in divers Lewd and Immoral*
“ *Practices, to the great Dishonour of Al-*
“ *mighty God, the Scandal of our Holy Re-*
“ *ligion, and the ill Examples of others, and*
“ *contrary to the Intent and Meaning of the*
“ *Laws already made; Be it therefore Ena-*
“ *cted, &c. That if any such Person or*
“ *Persons aforesaid, who by the Laws are*
“ *obliged to Receive the Sacrament of the*
“ *Lord's Supper, according to the Rites and*
“ *Usages of the Church of England, as a Qua-*
“ *lification for his, or their Respective Office*
“ *or Employment, shall at any Time after*
“ *their Admission into their Respective Offices*
“ *or Employments, and during his or their*
“ *Continuance in such Office or Employment, be*
“ *Guilty of Blasphemy, contrary to the Sta-*
“ *tutes of the 9th and 10th Year of King*
“ *William the III. Or of Propbane Cursing or*
“ *Swearing, contrary to the Statute of the*
“ *6th and 7th Year of King William the III.*
“ *Chap. 11. Or of Excessive Drinking or Tip-*
“ *pling, contrary to the Statutes of the 4th*
“ *Year of King James the I. Chap. 5. And*
“ *of the 21st Year of King James the I.*
“ *Chap. 7. Or of Profanation of the Lord's*
“ *Day, contrary to the Statute of the 29th*
“ *Year of King Charles the II. Chap. 7. Or*
“ of

“ of *absenting themselves from Church by the space of a Month*, contrary to the Statute of the 23d of *Queen Elizabeth*. Chap. 1. Or of *Adultery or Fornication*, contrary to the Known Laws of God. and the Ecclesiastical Constitutions of this Realm; and shall thereof be legally Convicted, &c. That then every Person so Offending as aforesaid, shall Incur the same Penalties, Forfeitures, and Incapacities, as if he had been present at any *Conventicle or Meeting, under Colour or Pretence of any Exercise of Religion, in other Manner than according to the Liturgy, and Practice of the Church of England.*

Upon this Clause, it is humbly Offer'd to Consideration.

1. Whether the Receiving of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the Rites and Usages of the Church of England, do only oblige Men to a Conformity of those Rites and Usages, and no other? Or, Whether it do not also Oblige Men Religiously to Regard all the Doctrines and Laws of Christ's Holy Religion? And, Whether it be not as strong an Engagement against Immorality and Profaneness, as it is against Non-Conformity?

2. Whether the Rubrick perfix'd to the Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, [which Appoints, *That none who is an Open and Notorious Evil Liver, shall presume to come to the Lord's Table, until he has openly Declared himself to have truly Repented, and Amended his former naughty Life; that the Congregation may thereby be Satisfied, which before was Offended*] be not as Good and Wholsom a Constitution of the Church of England, and every Way as Binding, and as fit to be Supported, as that which Obligeth the People to Receive the Communion all Meekly Kneeling? And, whether a common Drunkard, and a common Swearer, may not be look'd upon as an *Open and Notorious Evil Liver*, in the Sense of that Rubrick?

3. Whether the Laws which have provided, That every Person to be Admitted into any Office or Employment, should Receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the Rites and Usage of the Church of England, did not thereby intend; That such Persons should be not only Conformable to the Church as by Law Establish'd; But also, that they should be Persons of a Religious, Sober and Virtuous Life; For, otherwise by the Rubrick aforesaid, They were not to be Admitted to the Lord's Table.

4. Whether the undeniable Profaneness of too many of the Officers, both of the Army and Navy, do not cast some Reflections upon those Ministers of the Church of England; who Admitted them to the Lord's Table, to Qualifie them for their Offices, before they had (according to the Rubrick,) truly Repented and Amended their former naughty Lives? And, whether some Expedient should not be found out to prevent that Reflection?

5. Whether the Conformity of the Irreligious, the Deists, and the Profane, to Qualifie them for Offices, be not as truly an Occasional Conformity as that of Dissenters; and therefore, whether the Clause offer'd, would not have been Necessary to the full Answering of the Title of the Bill?

6. Whether all those Reasons which the Commons at the Free Conference, Jan. 16, 1702. Urged for the Preventing of the Occasional Conformity of Dissenters; be not as Strong for the Preventing of the Occasional Conformity of the Vicious and Profane? And, whether it be not as Just and Reasonable, for one single Act or Instance of Vice and Profaneness, (much more a continued Course) to Punish and Incapacitate a Man as Vicious and Profane; as it is to Punish and Incapacitate a Man as a Dissenter, for being once present at a Dissenters Meeting?

See the Lord's Account 300.

Let us then take the Common's Reasons in order as they ly, and enquire,

1. Whether it would not contribute as much to the Support of the Interests both of Church and State, p. 22. thus to discountenance Atheism and Prophaneness (which are certainly destructive to all Societies Civil and Sacred) as thus to discountenance the Separation? And, Whether since the Prevalency of Vice, if not timely remedied, threatens (as the Proclamation expresses it) to draw down the Divine Vengeance upon the Kingdom, all that are Friends to the Church and State, should not do what they can to prevent that Vengeance?

(2.) Whether the Occasional Conformity of the Vicious and Profane be not as Scandalous a Practice as the Occasional Conformity of sober and moderate Dissenters? And, Whether it be not as great a Reproach to Religion, and do not give as just an Offence to all good Christians, and even to the best of the Church of England men themselves? And, Whether the Intent of this Bill should not have been as well to restrain, to put a stop to the one as to the other?

(3.) Whether

(3.) Whether this Clause opoſeth to *Enact any thing new*, more than the Bill did? And, Whether it might not juſtly be intended to make not only the *Laws in Being*, but alſo Her Majeſties Proclamation more effectual?

(4.) Whether ſince the Invention, ſince the Iniquity of Atheiſtical and Profane Men have found out ways to evade and elude the *Laws* which were thought ſufficient to ſecure *Virtue and Religion*, any one can doubt but that the *Lords*, and *Commons* too, would let theſe Men ſee, they will not be wanting on their part to maintain and ſupport them? And, Whether ſince (as the Proclamation ſaith) we cannot expect the *Bleſſing of Almighty God* without a *Religious Obſervance of his Holy Laws*, this Clause be not as neceſſary as the Bill it ſelf for the preventing of thoſe Miſchiefs which muſt prove deſtructive to the *Church and the Monarchy*?

(5.) Whether if any ſhould have p. 23. oppoſed this Clause, they might not be thought capable of having *Deſigns*, they were aſham'd to own? And whether ſince nothing is deſign'd in it, but the *Preſervation of Virtue and Morality*, as well as of *Chriſtianity*, any doubt can be made of its having met with the *cheerful Concurrence* of both Houſes?

(6.) Whether the Support of *Ibid.* Chriſts Holy Religion be not *absolutely neceſſary* to the Support of the *Church of England*? And whether it be not eſpecially neceſſary at this Day, when ſo many ill Men deny the *Inſpiration of the Sacred Writings*, (many more than pretend to *Inſpiration* themſelves) and when there are ſo many weak Men to follow them?

(7.) Whether if the Support of *Chriſtianity* be neceſſary, the only effectual Way to do it be not by keeping the *Civil Power* in the Hands of thoſe, whoſe Principles and Practices are conformable to it.

(8.) Whether all ought not to *Ibid.* have freſh in their Minds, the *Confuſions and Calamities* that have been brought upon the Nation, by ſuch as pretend to be in the true Intereſt of the *Church of England*, and their Country, and yet by their *Atheiſtical Principles*, and their vicious and immoral Lives, have prov'd dangerous Enemies to both? And whether one might not reaſonably have thought, that the *Teſt-Act* had provided a ſufficient Barrier to deſeat and diſappoint the Attempts of the *Irreligious and Profane*, by Enacting, that all in Offices ſhould receive the *Lords Supper*, and thereby teſtitie their

Belief of all the Sacred Doctrines of the Goſpel, and oblige themſelves to an obſervance of all its Laws? And whether one could ever have imagin'd, that a Set of Men would at any time riſe up of ſuch profligate Conſciences, as to arraign *Divine Revelation*, ridicule ſerious Godlineſs, and live in a conſtant Contradiction to the great *Laws of Chriſtianity*, and yet, for Preferment to ſubmit to the moſt ſacred and binding Rite of that Holy Religion?

(9.) Whether it would not have been both the *Glory and Safety* of *Ibid.* Her Majeſties moſt Auspicious Reign, if now ſuch an Act as this ſhould have paſt in favour of the *Church of England*, That the *Laws* againſt *Impiety and Immorality* (the Churches moſt dangerous Enemies) which have been neglected, may hereby be effectually enforced? And whether this would not have been highly pleaſing to Her Majeſty, who hath by Her Pious Proclamation intimated, That there needs ſome further Expedients, to reduce to *Shame and Contempt*, thoſe ill Habits and Practices which the *Laws*, it may be, are not ſufficient wholly to prevent; and even particularly recommended the *Good Example* of thoſe in Authority, as the beſt Expedient? And whether the Ends of Her Majeſties Proclamation could better have been answer'd, than by keeping *Profane and Vicious Men* out of Offices, who have ſufficiently ſhewn they never wanted the Will, when they had the Power to *deſtroy Chriſtianity*, and with it the *Church of England*.

(10.) Whether it be poſſible, that this Clause ſhould be miſrepreſented, *Ibid.* and under any Colour oppoſ'd; but by ſuch only as having Sold themſelves to work *Wickedneſs*, hate to be Reform'd?

(11.) Whether there be any *Legal Toleration* of *Atheiſm and Profaneneſs*, on which this Clause would be in any Danger of intrenching? *Ibid.*

(12.) Whether this Clause would have taken from the *Atheiſts* and p. 24. *Profane* any one Privilege they have by Law, or given any one Privilege to *Virtue and Religion*, which is not at leaſt intended them by the *Laws* as they now ſtand, and by Her Majeſties Declaration, that ſhe will upon all Occaſions diſtinguiſh Men of *Piety and Virtue*, by Marks of Her Royal Favour.

(13.) Whether (of the Two) there be not ſtronger and better Reaſons, for the incapacitating of thoſe for Offices, that are incorrigibly

Ms. A. 9. 2. 27
p. 186
p. 247
p. 186
p. 247

bly Vicious and Profane; than of those who are otherwise, Men of sincere Affection to Vertue and Religion, Zealous for Her Majesties Government, true to the Interests of the Nation, cordial Friends to all the Essentials of the Church of England, and having the truest Zeal to support it: Tho' they are not yet so passionately enamour'd with its peculiar Rites and Forms, as to think it a Mortal Sin to Worship God without them, but for the present are of the mind of those Noble Lords, who thought that the Dissenters could not properly be called Schismatics?

Let us compare this Clause with the Bill to which it might have been annex'd, and let us enquire,

1. Whether Prophaning the Blessed Name of God, by Oaths and Curses, be not really a Greater Crime than a devout and conscientious joining with the Godly Prayer of a Dissenter, suppose in a private Family, or in Visiting of the Sick? And therefore, Whether the Penalty of Two Shillings for the former, and of One Hundred Pounds (Five Hundred perhaps) and Loss of Livelihood for the later, be proportionable?

2. Whether those that pretend to be for the Church, but seldom, or never, go to Church, be not worse Men, and more hurtful to the Present Establishment, than those who sometimes Religiously attend the Worship of God according to the usage of the Church of England, and sometimes according to the usage of the French and Dutch Churches, establish'd in this Realm? And whether therefore the former should be liable only to the Penalty of Twelve Pence a Sunday, and the latter liable to the heaviest Punishment next to loss of Life, for so, incapacity to serve one's Country, the Lords say, may justly be accounted?

3. Whether it be not possible that a Moderate Church-man, who thinks he may lawfully be present sometimes at a Meeting of Dissenters, and on some Occasions ought to do so; may (both the one and the other) therein act, according to the Dictates of their own Consciences? And whether therefore the putting of so great a Penalty, either upon the one or the other, as this Bill did, would not have been Persecution for Conscience only? than which (as the Preamble of the Bill declares) nothing is more contrary to the Profession of the Christian

Religion, and particularly to the Doctrine of the Church of England. But on the other hand, Whether it be possible that any should pretend themselves bound in Conscience to persist in Vice and Immorality?

4. Whether it be not more Necessary to strengthen the Bulwarks against those Practices which Her Majesty hath by Proclamation declar'd her Pious Resolution to discountenance and punish, to discourage and suppress, than against those Practices which are permitted and allowed, and taken under the Protection of the Government by an Act of Parliament, which Her Majesty hath Declar'd, She will be careful to preserve and maintain, and which the Bill acknowledgeth ought inviolably to be observed?

5. Since Magistrates are not empower'd to punish Dissenters, but are (besides the Obligation of the Laws and their Oaths) particularly Required and Commanded by Her Majesty's Proclamation to be vigilant and strict in the Discovery and Effectual Prosecution and Punishment of all Persons who shall be guilty of Excessive Drinking, Blasphemy, Prophane Swearing or Cursing, Lewdness, Prophanation of the Lord's Day, and other dissolute, immoral or disorderly Practices; and are especially charged to suppress all Bawdy-Houses, &c. And this Upon pain of Her Majesties Highest Displeasure, and of being proceeded against with the utmost Rigor that may be by Law: Whether it be not much more Necessary to keep out of the Magistracy such as being themselves Vicious and Prophane, will not only be remiss and negligent in putting those wholesome Laws in Execution which are so Solemnly given them in Charge, but by their Example support and propagate Vice and Prophaneness, than to Exclude such as would be faithful and vigorous in their Obedience to Her Majesty, but only are so weak as to think themselves oblig'd in Conscience to give Countenance sometimes to the Assemblies of pious and peaceable Dissenters, or of the Protestant Refugees?

6. Whether the incapacitating of the vicious and prophane be not a likely Means to Reform them, and bring them to Vertue, which will be a Point gain'd to the Church, while the incapacitating of moderate and pliable Dissenters will be in danger to harden them, and confirm them in their Dissent, which will be a Point lost to the Church?

By a Loyal Subject of Her Most Gracious Majesty (whom God long Preserve and Bless)
And a True Lover of the Church of England.

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