

DEBATES IN THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT.

HOUSE OF LORDS,

June 9.

HIS Majesty, for the first time since his late indisposition, gratified his Peers by his presence upon the Throne. His Majesty came with the usual state from St. James's Palace to the House, and being robed as usual, took his seat upon the Throne.

Sir Francis Molyneux, Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod, having been dispatched to demand the attendance of the House of Commons, they appeared at the bar preceded by their newly-elected Speaker.

Mr. Addington addressed his Majesty in a short speech, replete with expressions of modesty and diffidence; and hoped his Majesty would be pleased, by his royal disapprobation of their present choice, to afford his faithful Commons an opportunity of electing a person better qualified to discharge the duties of an office so important.

The Lord Chancellor replied, that he was commanded by his Majesty to inform him, that the choice which his faithful Commons had made, was fully confirmed by his royal approbation; and that he was perfectly convinced that Mr Addington would fill with adequate dignity the high office to which he was appointed.

The Speaker and the Commons then retired; and his Majesty also immediately quitted the House in the same form with which he had entered it.

The Lords, having adjourned for a short time to disrobe themselves, upon the resumption of the House.

The order of the day was read for the second reading of Lord Stanhope's Bill for the repeal of certain penal statutes for not attending divine worship, &c.

The Archbishop of Canterbury rose, and contended, that if the Bill before their Lordships should be passed into a law, it would be of infinite injury and danger to the established church, as it went to the actual repeal of a great number of statutes, though it at first view appeared only to aim at the repeal of four or five. He admitted that there were many statutes which disgraced the times in which they were passed; he agreed that some ought to be repealed and others amended; it was however of the utmost importance that so great a subject should not be taken up lightly, or decided on without the most serious consideration. He reprobated the clause granting liberty to write, print, and

publish all kinds of investigations whatever upon religious topics. The words of the clause were so broad, that they would serve to cover every species of religion, and to countenance every effort to disgrace Christianity. His Grace pointed out as a singular circumstance, that the word Christianity was never once introduced in the whole clause; and with great force of reasoning shewed, that the very foundations of the religion by law established might be undermined and overthrown under the indefinite licentiousness that the clause might be construed to sanction. His Grace put a great variety of questions to illustrate the dangerous looseness of the wording of the clause, and to shew that there was an essential difference, and a wide distinction between free investigation, and the propagation of such opinions as might be the result of such investigation. As the law stood at present, his Grace asserted, that every man was at liberty to investigate religious topics; but he contended, that if unrestrained speaking, writing, printing, and publishing of religious opinions, were permitted, there was scarcely a mischief to the church, or to civil society, that imagination could form an idea of, that might not be effected. If the enemy of Christianity might be at liberty to propagate his pernicious arguments, grounded in error and coloured with consummate art, what impression might they not make on the ignorant and lower rank of mankind? If a man should entertain so unfortunate an opinion as the disbelief of the existence of a God, and should imagine that God's being was a mere fiction, and if he were sincere in this unfortunate opinion, was he, under the wording of the present clause, to be at liberty to disseminate so dangerous and uncomfortable a doctrine? Suppose another were to profess himself a strong admirer of morality, but an enemy to all religion, was he to be allowed to spread abroad such profession?—Let their Lordships recollect, that it was the common artifice of the Atheists of old, to resort to that mode of imposition on the minds of the bulk of mankind, and it was but too obvious that there were many, who might be deluded by such sophistry. He declared, if the Atheist was to be allowed to defend his atheism by argument, he saw no reason why the thief might not be permitted to reason in behalf of theft, the burglarer of burglary, the seducer of seduction, the murderer of murder, the traitor of treason. Therefore, although he was ready to allow, that there were on the statute books some Acts of Parliament of a persecuting spirit in matters of religion, which