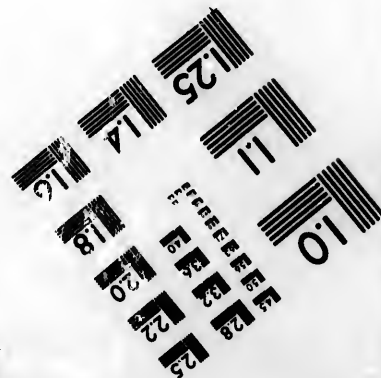
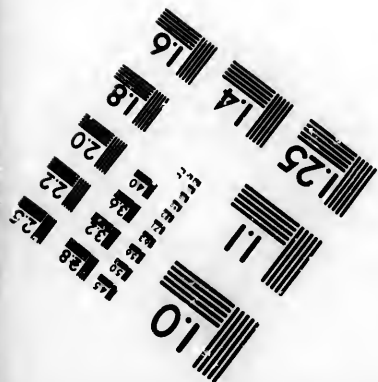
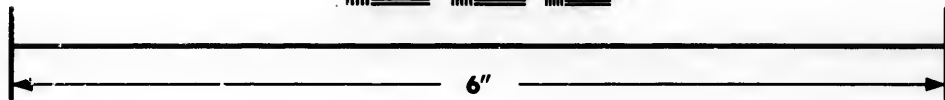
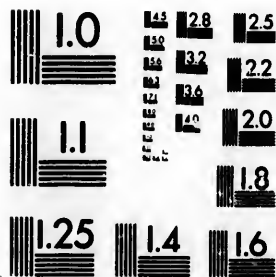


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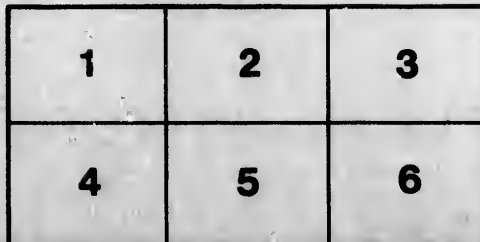
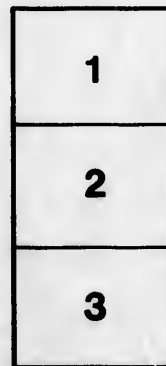
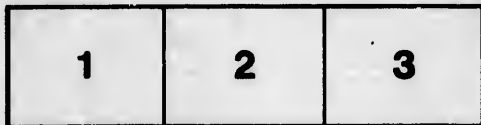
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*Benj. Gaskell  
Print. Coll.  
Cambridge*

L E T T E R

TO THE

PUBLIC MEETING

OF THE FRIENDS TO THE

REPEAL

OF THE

TEST AND CORPORATION ACTS,

AT THE

LONDON TAVERN,

On FEBRUARY the 13th, 1790.

FROM

A LAY DISSENTER.

Some Men object too much, consult too long, adventure too little, repent too soon, and seldom drive business home to the full period, content with a Mediocrity of Success

LORD BACON'S ESSAYS,

L O N D O N : P R I N T E D .

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L E T T E R, &c.



GENTLEMEN,

**D**EPRIVED of the satisfaction of being present at your meeting, I feel myself impelled to take this method of submitting a few thoughts to your consideration, in support of the RESOLVES which will be proposed for your concurrence.—At this critical period, there is scarcely an Individual whose efforts in favour of religious liberty may not in some respects be beneficial. In a little Army not a private soldier should be absent from the Ranks: We should all consider ourselves as bound to do the best we can for the advancement of the common cause, and to evidence our zeal, that we may incite others to activity.



It is my conviction of the necessity of a general exertion, that leads me to address this Letter to you, and not the vain presumption, that my services can have any thing more than a good intention to recommend them. Though the nightly guard of your persons and your property gives you no information when he calls the hour, yet you justly require him to do so, because it is a proof that he is present at his station, and mindful of his duty. These few lines may at least serve to shew that the actual number of your meeting is by no means a complete catalogue of those whose hearts are full of ardent wishes for the restoration of our rights. I solicit your attention with confidence, because I know that I am touched by feelings which are not particular, and that I express not my own opinion only, but that of many of the most respectable among our friends.

This I am sure of, that the *Resolutions* are founded on sentiments, which not only all dissenters, but all friends to freedom and to truth, ought to entertain concerning those statutes by which so many of us and of our fellow citizens are deprived of our rights; and it is hoped they are framed so as to fear no antagonists but those of liberty and reason. It cannot be necessary, in writing to such a meeting, convened for such purposes as it is, and at so interesting a time, to say

say *much* in support of motions which are grounded on the general principles of liberty, and which are designed to accelerate the removal of a national disgrace, and an irreligious prophanation. This would be attempting to illuminate a sun-beam!

It is plainly unnecessary to endeavour to persuade you to declare,

That exclusion from civil offices, on account of religious opinions, is unjust and impolitic.

That the Dissenters have been guilty of no crime deserving such disgrace and punishment.

That the Test Laws are oppressive and persecuting.

That a Sacramental Test is a vile prostitution of a sacred ordinance.

That the Clergy, as honest and religious men, ought to assist our endeavours.

That the best means ought to be devised for procuring the repeal of these unchristian Statutes.

That the Dissenters, if compelled against their wills to have an interest separate from that of their

fellow citizens, ought to support that Interest, and to guard it.

That the charge brought against us, of wishing to overthrow the national church, is a wicked misrepresentation, and an unmanly device for exciting the passions of our countrymen against us.

Or, That those who have hitherto been active friends to our applications, merit our confidence, our gratitude, and our support.

This is the substance of what you now will be moved to resolve; and to say much in favour of such sentiments to you, gentlemen, would be wasting your time unprofitably, and would be betraying a most unwarrantable distrust of the freedom and liberality of your opinions.

In declaring these sentiments, which I hope will become yours, (if similar thoughts come not in a better form before you from some other quarter), it has been intended to express them plainly, manly and discreetly. The two former qualities, those of perspicuity and spirit may prevent them from dishonouring the reasonableness and justice of our claims: the latter, that of discretion, it is hoped will render them palatable even to the most timid and cautious of our friends. In order to remove, as far as it could be, the possibility

lity of dissention, it has been thought right to repress the Ardour arising from a satisfactory consciousness of good intention, and to sacrifice in some degree, even justifiable opinions of prudence to the possible apprehensions of others.— For, Gentlemen, I do intreat you to be well aware that Timidity is not always prudence, nor is mildness at all times a virtue. There are Occasions which demand a spirited assertion of a freeman's claims; there are situations where safety is only to be found in firmness and in spirit. I know not what the honest passion of indignation was given us for, if it is not to be excited by continued misrepresentation and by intolerable oppression.— But general reasonings in favour of spirited measures come from a justly suspected quarter when urged by an anonymous writer, and I therefore appeal from them to the undelusive, intelligible evidence of fact. For more than a hundred years, years made long by repeated persecutions, and by a persevering resistance to our wishes; we have requited good for evil, and have been the most industrious as well as most effectual friends to a Constitution, equal and impartial to all men but to us. We have submitted in silence, in a Silence only broken by a few feeble requests for justice; but never interrupted by resentment on those requests being refused. You have ever been loyal to your sovereigns, obedient to the laws, devoted to the constitution: perhaps by being firm

friends to the latter, you may have lost the countenance of the former: perhaps your love of your country may not have very greatly increased your interest at St. James's.

Will you bribe your Governors to your interest by becoming the Tools of power? or will you hope for success from the energy of your own exertions? Mere Quietness will never do. You must become bad citizens before your Enemies at court will Voluntarily admit you to the privileges of good ones. What have you obtained by your peaceable demeanour? Are you reinstated in your Rights? *Have* your subjection and your patriotism recommended you to government? Are we not excluded by Law from all places of Trust, from the Chancellorship down to that of a public Executioner? Can that respectable gentleman be permitted by Law to perform his important Office, unless he has first duly qualified himself at the Lord's Table? Can the fatal Knot be legally tied, except "*by the hallowed fingers of a Communicant?*"

It is with reluctance I go on to claim more of your Time; but a Spirit of Servility is abroad which requires attack and detection.

An unexpected opposition may arise at the Meeting, which however I hope, and am indeed convinced

convinced, may be rendered ineffectual. Should any division be called for by those who will only venture to attack particular expressions in the Resolutions; such opposers must be left to satisfy their own consciences respecting the prudence and generosity of their conduct. All the objections I can foresee may be reduced to one, 'That the Resolutions breathe a spirit too bold for the temper of the Times.' All the arguments likely to be urged, will be arguments in favour of caution, prudence and moderation.

Gentlemen, It is too often taken for granted, and I think especially among serious people, that want of spirit is prudence; that fearfulness and inactivity are policy. It would indeed be hard, if timid and indolent men had not resolution and vigour enough to raise them up in their easy chairs, in order to indulge on their darling topics; the censure of spirit; the abuse of enterprize.

Moderation is unquestionably a Virtue: but not a Virtue of all times and of all seasons. It is on some occasions Cowardice, on others it is Treachery. But I turn with pleasure from general remarks to the authority of years and experience; to the authority of one of the wisest, and for many years one of the honestest men that ever sat in an English Parliament, Col. Titus. In a debate on the Exclusion Bill, during the reign of that

that profligate promise-breaker Charles the Second; this great man said, " We are advised to be moderate; but I do not take Moderation to be a prudent Virtue in all cases that may happen.— If I were fighting for my own life, and the lives of my wife and children, should I do so moderately? If I were riding on a road to save my Throat from Thieves, and I should be advised to ride moderately lest I spoiled my horse, would not such Advice seem contemptible at such a time? And so certainly if we were in a sinking ship (no unapt representation of our decaying constitution) would it be wretched counsel to *pump moderately* for fear of a fever?"

These soft words, gentlemen, generally "mean more than meets the ear." They are often used to protect men from the laudable resentment of injured innocence. Candour is an excellent quality: Civility an useful virtue: Politeness an agreeable qualification: but there is one thing which for great occasions is fairly worth them all—*Truth*. In the little incidents of human life, let these petty, subordinate excellencies appear and please; but let them not prevent men from asserting serious rights in serious expressions, from speaking of grievous oppressions with just indignation. In such a situation as we are placed in, it would be Hypocrisy to treat tyranny with reverence,

verence, or honour falsehood with the ceremony of confutation. It would be Treachery to ourselves to bow down with feigned respect before those who deny Justice: It would almost be impiety towards our Maker to speak of profanation and irreligion in any terms but those of the severest Censure. If then we are blamed by any for the use of terms correspondent to our feelings, let us not by a tame and silent submission acknowledge a fault when we have a right to assume a Merit. What such men mean by moderation and decorum is indeed of great use in public Affairs, never of greater than when it shelters folly from ridicule, and dishonesty from detection, or when measures are considered which nothing can preserve from Contempt but the solemnity with which they are treated. Great men are incircled by the fortifications of ceremony: approach them in form, and they have settled rules for your reception. Speak plainly, and Speak the Truth: you find them poor human creatures like ourselves, and quite unprepared to answer language which surprises them from its novelty. O! but "we shall excite Opposition"—yes—but Opposition begets examination—Examination begets conviction. We triumph in the anticipation of such an Opposition! We rejoice in the prospect of such an Examination.

What



What have we to fear from the efforts of our Enemies? if we may judge of what they can do from what they have done.

At Southampton an interested Corporation (triumphing in a monopoly of Offices, because its members could not otherwise enjoy them) meets and passes resolves equally devoid of good sense, good writing, or good grammar.

A Prelate distinguished by the meekness and humility of his christianity, having been defeated with disgrace in his attempts to disturb the peace of a scientific Society, turns his noisy but harmless weapons on the unoffending dissenters, and if I am rightly informed, secures to an honest Gentleman his election, by declaring that he wishes him to lose it. We will not leave him to the Chastisement of his own conscience, till we are sure he can afford to keep one. We will turn him over to the resentment of the House of Commons, whose privileges he has violated.—Though his scandal is void of hurt, yet he may be justly punished, as witches were of old, because they thought themselves witches. Not because they did mischief, but because they intended it.

A County meeting is called by a junto of those independent gentlemen, the Lords of the Bed-chamber,

chamber; and there, even there, the resolves against us are carried by a small majority.

The chief Officer in a distinguished manufacturing town convenes only those of its Inhabitants who are members of the establishment, and then finding a Majority against him, refuses to hear any debate in a Meeting expressly called for the purpose of consultation, and ventures to affix his name to resolutions, which were never read nor passed.

A society for promoting Christian knowledge, seizes with avidity so inviting an opportunity of diffusing religious information; takes our intended application into consideration; forgets every thing that is religious in the question; passes over in total silence all our objections to the prostitution of the sacrament, and asserts the necessity of Test Laws, without bestowing one single solitary thought on the nature of that Test, of which it defends the propriety. Yet over this meeting one prelate presided, and another framed the resolutions!! Save but the Temporalities of the church, and let the laws of Christ be violated with impunity!

A clergyman elevated into public notice by a citizen in high office; an illiterate zealot, as he is generally

generally imagined; but in fact a well-meaning ignorant friend to us, who not knowing much, yet knowing this, that the Dissenters have for a century been trying in vain, what fair argument and good temper could do in the support of their cause; plainly saw, that his only chance for assisting them was, by employing against them illiberal abuse, and ungovernable rage. Magnanimously regardless of his own character, he willingly sacrifices that in the cause of reason; and therefore, as far as we are concerned, leaves us only to lament that the sacrifice was so insignificant, the victim so ridiculous.

Such opposition as this, is better than support. Let the spirits of faction do their worst. Let them erect their crests, and roll their gilded spires, and hiss, and threaten, and throw their venom around. The spirit of Liberty, like the divine rod of Aaron, shall swallow up all the serpents of the Magicians. The day of triumph cannot be far distant; if we are not wanting to ourselves. However you may dispose of the Resolutions that will be proposed to you, suffer not the meeting to pass away without doing something. This would be to render ourselves ridiculous in the eyes of our country friends; and contemptible in the estimation of our adversaries. We have every thing

thing to hope from activity, and nothing to fear. Our situation cannot be worse; it may be better.

Let those that put their trust in the paternal affection of Kings, and the tender consciences of Ministers, wait for the relief which they will not demand; but let us rely on the vigour of our own exertions, on the good sense of our countrymen, and on the wisdom of parliament. Perseverance in a bad cause, makes even a bad cause respectable. Perseverance in a good cause, renders a good one irresistible. Be not discouraged by the apparent disproportion between the influence of single efforts, and the magnitude of the difficulties you have to encounter. Nothing good or great is to be obtained without courage and industry; but courage and industry must have sunk in despair, and human life remained unornamented and unimproved, if men had nicely compared the effect of a single stroke of the chissel with the pyramid they were to raise, or a single impression of the spade with the mountain they were to level.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen, your most respectful,

Humble servant,

\* \_ \* \* \* \*

