
The Author of the *Shortest-Way* has indeed made a short Step of it from the Conventicle to the Gallows; but all Men must allow it is no Safe-Way for any Government to Hang up so many of its Subjects; ’tis not Opinion, but the Strength and Number of Hands, is the best Security to any Government; and the wisest Legislators have made Laws for the composing of the Minds of the Populace, by making a Harmony in Government proceed from the Different Opinions of their People. The Way our Author has mark’d out for the Dissenters is pernicious to the Government.

In regard that those People pay a great Part of the Taxes; and if the Persecution this Man aims at should fall upon them, it would be one Way to make our Funds deficient, by driving them from their Trades, and perhaps forcing them Beyond-Sea to settle our useful Manufactures in Foreign Parts, which yet would be a greater Damage to the Publick.

No wise Man would deny the Assistance of one, tho’ of never so different an Opinion in Matters of Religion; and no Man can deny but that the present State of the Government of England, and indeed the State of our Allies Abroad, require the greatest Union of Her Majesty’s Subjects at Home.

A Contention for Offices seems more a Cavil for Interest, than for Religion; for my part, I care not who are in possession of Offices, provided they manage them for the Interest of England; and if they do not, ’tis no matter of what Religion they call themselves; but whatever pretence the Author of this Book may have that Way, ’tis plain his Design is to create Fends [sic] and Animosities among Her Majesty’s Subjects, by proposing such Barbarous Usage to Dissenters.

Having urged thus much against *The Shortest-Way with the Dissenters*, I come to consider which is the Safest-Way with them, and that is to let them alone; I don’t now speak in Relation to Offices, but to the Rigorous Usage prescrib’d against them by the Author of *The Shortest-Way*.

This Way is the Safest, Best, and most Rational, Way that can be; Experience is the best Instructor in this Point. I shall not search backwards to the Reformation, and deduce Instances, how much the dissenting Cause has been strengthen’d by Persecution; and how much the Numbers of the Dissenters have encreas’d when they have been most violently Attack’d; there are other Things besides Virtue, which, like Camomile, grow the better for being Depress’d; but I shall confine my self only to the State of the Dissenting Interest in the late Reign, and then leave you to judge whether Toleration or Persecution does most lessen or augment the Dissenting Interest.

Before the (Revolution in K. C. II’s Reign especially) the Dissenters thriv’d under Persecution; Men in Affliction, of what kind soever, being the Objects of Men’s Pity; by their stedfast Adherence to their Principles, and their taking joyfully the spoiling of their Goods, every Body believed they suffer’d for Conscience sake: Their Party was thus established on the Sure Basis of Suffering; than which, I must tell you, there is no Surer Tie and Obligation to a Party; and their Pityers and Well-wishers, even in the Church of England, grew yet more Numerous.
Upon the Revolution they gain’d a Point which they never could before obtain a Toleration by Law, which some People at that time thought would weaken the Buttresses, if not until the Church; but that they were Mistaken in their Opinions is Evident from solid Reason founded upon Matter of Fact.

For no sooner was the Toleration Bill pass’d, and their Preachers set up for lawful Ministers in the Pulpits, but their Laymen set up for Courtiers, and advanc’d themselves to Offices, leaping over the Fence of the Sacrament by the Dispensation and Approbation of their Preachers, which Action but a few Years before would have been under the Censure of their Churches: Now this Dispensation of their Preachers has in the long run prov’d very Fatal to the Dissenting Interest; for no sooner were they got into Offices, no sooner did they turn Courtiers, but they turn’d Knaves, Selling of Offices to any Persons who were the highest Bidders, and sending (for the sake of Lucre) the most deserving of their Party to beg their Bread under a Government they had lost their All to Establish; so greedy were they of Money (formerly by them called the Mammon of Unrighteousness) that they leapt over all the Fences of Religion, Common Honesty and Justice, to come at it; insomuch that there was not one Dissenter in any Considerable Post in that Reign but upon these Accounts was blemish’d, except Mordecai Abbot.

These Actions of theirs bred that Fatal Distinction among ’em of Antient and Modern Whigs, made such a Breach among ’em that can never again be cemented; Modern and Antient Whigs being as irreconcileable as Fire and Water; and thus they sapp’d the very Foundation of their own Cause; the Old Whigs stood firm to their English Principles, while the others were lur’d away by Self-interest, and the Devices of a vile Court Party, into the very Road of the Old Tories, against whom they so much complain’d in former Reigns; insomuch that they were for Standing Armies, and other Instruments of Slavery, Voted for Courtiers for Members of Parliament, set up a Power against the Common Hall in the City of London, introduc’d that Abominable Practice of Hawking for Sheriffs, and not so much as sparing their own Party in the Extortion of Fines; and Preach’d up the Jus Divinum of Modern Whiggism, as the others before them had done that of the Church, and Kingly Government; I say, can such a Party as this, who have abandoned their Principles, and are deserted by all the Brave, Just and Honest, Men of their Party, ever bring the Church in Danger, when by a Toleration they are Lessened, and become less Formidable than ever?

There is a Vein of Priestcraft runs through .their Religious Societies as well as others; and I dare engage their Shepherds will drive their Flocks to the Shadow of any Government, as long as they are allowed the Leisure and Liberty to take off their Fleeces; do but oblige the Shepherds, and I’ll warrant you their Dogs shall never bite you. ’Tis no matter how much their People suffer, if they have but Liberty of making Collections for themselves; I’ll assure you they us’d their suffering Friends so ill in the late Reign, that they’ll never again venture one Hair of their Heads for them in any other.

I might here appeal to the Observations of the Church Clergy, whether they do not find in their several Parishes the Numbers of the Dissenters much lessened since the Act of Toleration; and from that, and the Reasons aforesaid, leave them to judge, whether the safest and best Way to lessen the Dissenters, and their Interest, be not to
let them alone, i.e. to let them do it themselves.