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# REFLECTIONS

On the present

CONDUCT of the POPULACE,

Relating to the

GOVERNMENT.

Particularly, the

Prime MINISTER;

And the late

Motion for a NEW EXCISE.

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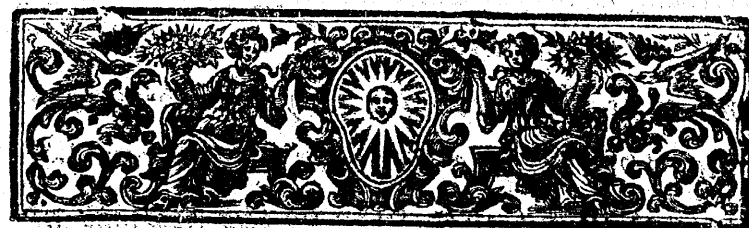
By NATH. POLHILL.

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THE  
P R E F A C E.



*Sufficient Excitement to this small Tract, is an Apprehension of some general Mistakes among the Common People, relating to the Government; as also the Uncommon Industry of those which occasion them Mistakes, are many and flagrant. And that which concerns the Bill now under Consideration, for a New Excise, is notorious to every Impartial Enquirer. Before I was better informed, I was under the same Mistake. I know my Sentiments will be hard for many to digest; but I care not for that;*

## The P R E F A C E.

*it is as much my Business as any one's; and it is the Part of every one to endeavour the Welfare of their Country. I am not in a Capacity to be the Subject of any one's Envy or Revenge. I have seen a Couple of trifling Pamphlets against the Bill which concerns Tobacco; but for it I have not seen or heard of any. I declare my self an Equal Well-wisher to the Increase of Trade, as of the Peace of the Nation; and at the same Time esteem it as necessary, that a Way be found to render the Hardships of our Trade as equal and general, as may be, to every trading Subject in the Nation. Nor is it less to the Advantage of the Kingdom in general, that Care be taken to secure to His Majesty his Necessary Supplies, which of late have been, many of them, pretty freely dispens'd with to different Purposes, and which no Way contribute to a fair Trade.*

N. P.

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## R E F L E C T I O N S

O N T H E

P r e s e n t C O N D U C T

O F T H E

P O P U L A C E, &c.



**I**T is a *Maxim* common among us, That of two different Opinions, that which is held by a Party having the Majority, is most likely to be valid. But it doth not always hold good, and is even frequently otherwise, especially among Persons of the lower Kind: But in respect to the National Ministry, or Persons of the First Degree, we ought very cautiously to

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cenſure the *Opinions* or *Acts* of the Majority. Nevertheless, nothing is more common, as is ſufficiently apparent in our Days, than for the Commonalty to imbibe and run away with Notions ridiculous and unreaſonable.

Concerning the late Dr. *Sacheverell*; it was the Opinion of the Majority in the Adminiſtration, and of all the Impartial, even in that Reign, that he was really guilty of the Crimes laid to his Charge; while, by the common ignorant Part of the whole Nation, he was not only treated as an Innocent Perſon, but in a manner ador'd, and more reſpected, than a Man of the moſt juſt Behaviour can deſerve. On the other hand, the Conduct of the Vulgar is equally ridiculous now, there being as unreaſonable a Forwardneſs to condemn the Innocent, as formerly to clear the Guilty, by the perpetual Inſtigations of reſtleſs ambitious Perſons. We are running out of the Way, and beſide the Mark, as much as poſſibly we can; and with a Reſolution too of lending no Ear to any Thing that hath the leaſt Tendency

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dency to Truth and Juſtice. That which is wanting in *Nature*, is ſufficiently made up to moſt by *Art*, to make them eſtabliſh'd Votaries to Ignorance and Obſtinacy. Every Subject may undoubtedly have the ſame Freedom of Thought, as of Words, and Actions too, ſo it be with a due Regard to Sovereignty, to Peace, and the Welfare of the Nation. There is no ſuch Thing as coming at the Right of Things, without a due impartial Conſideration; nor of Doing, or Speaking juſtly, and retain at the ſame Time a careleſs, unbounded Liberty of Speech or Action; than which nothing is more common, and by which we have frequent Discoveries of Things every Way unreaſonable, ungrateful, and ſometimes that which in Reality is worſe.

As Sovereignty and Subjection is of Neceſſity to be obſerv'd in every orderly Nation; and as Governments are in general appointed by the Decree, and ſuſtain'd by the Indulgence of Heaven, and are the very Centre of all Order; we ought readily to contribute to their peaceable Exiſtence,

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tence, instead of Speaking and Acting against them ; and to have a more peculiar Regard to that particular Supreme Legislature, under whose Direction we live. Concerning such Despensations as we may privately imagine remis, we are to use our utmost Care in our Censures, that we give no Seditious Examples, lest we prophane Things sacred, or, in other Words, bid Defiance to the Decree of Heaven, by opposing the *Powers that are ordain'd of God.*

As I imagine our present Sovereign to be reigning by the Decree of Heaven, so ought I to behave my self toward him, and his Ministry, in a Way agreeable thereto; giving all possible Preference to them who have much at Heart our Welfare, and who are establish'd *for the Correction of Evil-doers, and for the Encouragement of them that do well.*

Let those Gentlemen answer it as they are able, either to God, or Man, who are constantly employ'd for the fomenting of Strife and Sedition against a Government, that hath always made the Good and Tranquility

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quility of the People *their greatest Aim.* In the Midst of Oppression, we could do no more than complain ; but in the Midst of Peace, and under every possible Enjoyment, and under the mildest Usage, to complain, is preposterous ! And to summons all the disloyal, discontented Persons, and Men of desperate Fortunes, to a Combination in Complaints, seems as though there were in such, farther Views than are commonly pretended. We are now under the Guidance of the best establish'd Laws under Heaven ; and it is well known, notwithstanding our common Complaints, that some New Laws, of the most wholesome Kind to the Subject, have been enacted, in the latter, and present Reigns, and by the cautious prudent Advice of the Principal Persons in the present Ministry. A considerable Part of our Complaints consists of the Want of *Trade,* and the *Multitude of Taxes.* It is not always in the Power of the Administration to increase Trade, or to make Times better, especially when those Persons which shew the most Discontent do all they can  
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to hinder it; and as a Part of our Wealth too, is charitably dispos'd of towards the Maintenance of a Person abroad; and where there is not wanting in those common Disturbers a Will to bring us in Reality into that Slavery, of which they now unjustly complain.

Our Legislature can do no more toward the Encouragement of Trade, than to make such Laws as are most beneficial thereto. If we have too many People of the most unprofitable Kind in the Nation, or too many of each Employment, who can help it? Or if we of the Common Class do all that lies in our Power to hurt it, and to oppress one another, which are real Truths, why should we blame the Government? It is evidently for want of Order among our selves, and Honesty to one another, that we suffer many Inconveniencies in Trade. Look into the Laws made within these Eighteen Years, and see if in that Compass of Time, in all the former Reigns there have been a Set of Laws more adapted to the Increase of Trade than those are. If we have many Taxes, which it is

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certain we have, we have more to pay out of them, besides the National Debts, which has lain much at the Hearts of His Present and late Majesty. Besides, the Actions of our discontented Gentlemen have of late Years contributed to no inconsiderable Expence, such as pretend for having better Times, together with something else, if it lay in their Power.

The Money rais'd for our National Occasions need not be grievous to us, especially as it is done by our own Consent, and as there is not a single Penny either rais'd or expended, but is to be accounted for at the Pleasure of our Representatives, whom we intrust with the Whole of our Fortunes. But if we were to mind the Voice of the Populace at this Time, we are to believe our Royal Family, and the Prime Minister (as having not only a Will, but also a Power, without Controul) intend to fill their Coffers with the Subjects Money. The Integrity, Generosity, and Candour of that Right Honourable Gentleman, which is now by every one to be call'd in Question, has been too well try'd,

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to be disputed by every honest impartial *Englishman*, in a Time of Danger; and under a precarious Administration, he stood a firm unshaken Votary to Justice, Liberty, and the Protestant Religion: Beside all this, which is a solid Truth, it were foolish to imagine, a Gentleman in such a Station, to have a Desire to oppress the Subjects, or to divide the Prince from the People. But the Contradictions of our Murmurers are so unwisely contriv'd of late, as renders them obvious to every Beholder.

We should be very backward in entertaining unjust Conceits against a Gentleman, that hath for many Years been an active Servant to his Country, and that hath born on his Shoulders the heaviest, and most unthankful Part in the Administration. But it's to me an indisputable Truth, as I have sometimes observed, that the Grievance, as pretended, against this Gentleman, is not all, nor near the Matter: And without any Hesitation, I will venture to affirm, that certain Gentlemen of particular Views, have design'd rather to wound his Majesty, through the Sides of that  
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Minister: It can never be, that a Prejudice against a Subject, though an eminent one, can be carry'd to that Height, as it appears to be in some, meerly for the sake of a little ridiculous Envy.

It's only a fallacious Paradox, to declare Love to the Prince, and Hatred to his faithful Ministers; and such as are found so to do, are not a few in the Kingdom, only want an Opportunity of shewing themselves in their true Colours, and of doing what it's to be hoped, they will never be able to do: Nor was it for the sake, or out of Love to the late Queen, in the latter Part of her Reign, that Fault was found with some in that Ministry; but for the sake of, and Love to another Person and Cause.

I cannot help taking Notice of the Stir that hath been for several Sessions of Parliament, about the Pension Bill: I would not be supposed to signify, but that many for that Bill are worthy deserving Gentlemen; many Reasons for its becoming a Law are certainly plausible; but we should have as great a Regard for the right Timing of a Thing, as for the Thing itself. Were

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it possible, I should be glad of knowing what the Contrivers of that Bill would have thought of such a Thing twenty Years ago: I hope, there was as much Byassing or Influencing Gentlemen formerly, as now, and more too. But the Discontent does not arise from the Want of a free Parliament, for a freer was never known than the present; but from a Want of a Majority to their own Liking, and to serve their own Purposes. I would fain know, what those Gentlemen, which are the Subjects of some People's Grief, do, to oppress or hurt us more, than others would do in their Places: I believe our Happiness is more compleat in those we have, than in any we might have in their stead: However, it is more safe, to keep a certain Good, than to let it go for what is uncertain; and by my Consent, the Bill shall remain as it doth: However, till as great an Occasion shall offer for it as hath been formerly, and which, I hope, will never be again.

As good Reasons are given against keeping up our present Number of Forces, as against Pensioners sitting in Parliament:

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O the Good! our New-fashion'd Contrivers would do us, was it in their Power to save our Money, and preserve us from a perpetual Fear, least our potent Army should get the Power which is the Property of their Masters! What a Pity 'tis, they are not able to do us such singular Services, as to lessen the present Number of Forces, that if an Invasion should happen, we might be overcome; or rather, that our Second-hand Loyalists of the First-Rate, with their Mobbish Brethren, which are daily animated on Purpose, may, with or without a foreign Aid, attempt our Constitution with Success! For Goodness-sake, where lies the great Damage which is like to ensue upon the Nation, in keeping up three or four thousand Men in Pay more than is suppos'd to be necessary, and which would probably want Business too, if they were disbanded? What a strange Difference is there between People now, and formerly? that a third Part of the Number of Soldiers which has been formerly, should so affright and endanger us? This Project hitherto hath been altogether without Success; but

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who can tell, among the Variety on foot, but some one may take. There is, notwithstanding the many Disparities and Contradictions in the Manner of proposing our Grievances, a general Harmony in them all, as there is in the Complainants themselves, inasmuch as they all tend to answer one general and blessed Design.

It is from a constant Series of Misrepresentations concerning the Transactions of the Government, that so many are filled with seditious Principles; and the Eagerness of the Popularity, to receive for Truths, all that is told them, with that Tendency, gives continued and fresh Encouragements, for some Weekly Hackneys to continue their Employments: But what such would have done for Business of late, had it not been for the Excise Scheme, I am at a Loss to imagine; and if that should be soon over, as is suppos'd, I don't know any Thing whereon they can so ingeniously fasten for the Support of the *Good Old Cause*. But we may rejoyce a while on the Thoughts of our present Victory: The Greatness of it, the Sharpness of the late Encounter, the

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the Thanks we are in Gratitude to return to our sturdy Heroes, and the Greatness of the Bondage from which we are deliver'd, are great Topicks, and will very well serve for farther Enlargements.

I will, for once, give my Sense of the Proceedings of our Crafty-Foggy Gentlemen, from a Supposition of their meeting together in private Cabals, a short Time ago, and with their unanimous Agreement, on the following Resolutions:

- I. That having now an extraordinary Opportunity, we improve it to all possible Advantages for the Increase of Sedition, Faction, and Rebellion.
- II. That as the Scheme for a new Excise, proceeds from the Grand Object of our Envy, we agree to make him the Mark to receive the Discharge of their Ammunition, the Effects of Envy, Spleen, inveterate Hatred, Ambition, and Loyalty to our injur'd Prince.
- III. That we make perpetual and loud Harangues of a general Oppression and Tyranny.
- IV. That

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IV. That we possess Tradesmen with a Notion of a Standing Army of Excisemen.

V. That we terrify Tradesmen with Notions of a continual Concourse of Officers, to make Surveys by Night, and by Day, of being frighted from their Rest; of breaking open Doors, Dangers of Robbers, and causing Women with Child to miscarry.

VI. That we effectually publish the general Injury to be incurred by Tradesmen, *viz.* the Discovery of their Mysteries; which has always been their particular and peculiar Privilege.

VII. That if the Bill do pass, make Proclamation, that a Door is open'd for the Entrance of greater Evils, a general Excise, Plunder, Ruin, and Death to all Trade, and every Tradesman.

It's not much to be wonder'd at, if, as an infamous Author affirms, there be ninety-nine in every Hundred, against a New Excise,

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Excise, since such incessant and early Contrivances have been on foot for that Purpose, and since but few amongst those, but are willingly led into Opinions every way absurd, taking Things on Trust, and in the Midst of Ignorance, stiffly maintain what first is told them, there are ninety-nine to a Hundred incapable of giving two Reasons for their Opinion.

The prettiest Imagination of all, relating to the present Controversy, is that of telling the Common People the very Thoughts and farther Intentions of the Legislature, to torment us, if the Bill had pass'd: By a Spirit of Prophecy, undoubtedly, this great Discovery is made. It is the Property of Evil Spirits, to be ever restless, as in meditating Mischief, constant.

But that which is most worthy Observation, is, That a Bill of so pernicious a Nature, and of such a general ill Consequence to the Trade of the Nation, should notwithstanding pass the Majority of the House. What a Kind of Parliament is ours now? Are the Majority of the Lower House become Oppressors, Madmen, &c. Cannot they see the ill Consequences of oppressing

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oppressing Tradesmen, and spoiling Trade, as well as Mechanicks, Pedlars, or Smugglers? If the Case be as 'tis commonly reported, I'll set down the Majority in Parliament for a Set of super-annuated Gentlemen: It can never be right both Ways: However, either they, or the Common People, are mad indeed; for which Reason, I shall enquire wherein the Distraction lies.

And having the Happiness to be one of an impartial Enquiry into the Generality of Things, I have, as I imagine, let myself into the Truth relating to the Bill now under Consideration; and am confirm'd in my Opinion, that such an Alteration of the Duties on Tobacco, as the Bill specifies, would have a natural Tendency to the general Good of Trade, that is, a Proposal of no additional Duties, but a Removal of some Part of an old one, calculated only to secure the Dues of the Crown from that extensive Commodity, and to equalize among the Subjects the Chance of a fair Trade. This is the main Purport of that lamentable Scheme; which, according to the

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common Notion and Outrage of the People, might justly be thought to be fram'd in Hell.

Without insisting on the Defrauds committed in Tobacco, on the *Keys* only, which are evident enough, I would rather make a more general Search into the Matter, by making it appear, that there are Variety of Places, as well as Contrivances, for that Work. It's but a poor Argument, to alledge that a clandestine Trade could be carry'd on notwithstanding any Contrivance to prevent it: Which is probable enough: But, is there no Difference in Regard to Care? Would not the Difference be apparent, if private Houses were liable to the same Inspection of Excisemen, as Ships and the *Keys* are to Custom-House Officers? To my certain Knowledge, the fair Trader in Tobacco has suffer'd by the Dealers in Run and Stolen Goods: As the Case now stands, one has the Liberty, and it's frequently done, of selling 2 *d.* or 3 *d.* per Pound cheaper than another, and of getting more by it. If all the Dealers

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in Tobacco were liable to Surveys, and being accountable for what they bought and sold, with the Manner of it, the Case would be much otherwise; which might be done without any considerable Damage or Trouble to the Dealer: No doubt, but the Matter is best contriv'd in the present Bill; and there are divers Ways whereby it may be done. Let us only suppose every second Dealer in Tobacco obliged every three Months, under a severe Penalty, to lay before the Commissioners of Excise a just Account of the Goods bought and sold in that Compass of Time: By this Means, the King might have of each Dealer his just and equal Dues, and a few Surveys might serve the Purpose. And what mighty Difficulty would it be, to set down every Evening, the Transactions of the Day? This would be less troublesome to me, than to be depriv'd of my Trade by unfair Dealers. It is practicable, and often done privately, to convey Tobacco out of Ships into Houses; and although it is a bulky Commodity, it's a manifest Truth, that every

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every Year great Quantities are thus managed: But what would those Persons do with such Goods, if the New Scheme were to take place? or who would dare to buy it, if the Manner of buying it were to be accounted for? At present, there's no more to be done, but to get it into some convenient Place, and the Danger is over. As inconsiderable a Hand as People may be supposed to make in dealing thus in this bulky Commodity, I know of several that will brag of the Quantities they have thus procur'd and sold; some, by stealing, others, by running it. One Man in particular, which I cannot help believing, told me, he sold 1600 Weight of Run Tobacco at one Lump. Let us only consider what the Duty of 1600 Weight will amount to; and how finely I should think myself serv'd, to lose the Sale of the like Quantity, and my Customer ever after, because I cannot, as another can, furnish him with cheap Goods. If you ask a Man that buys Tobacco for 5*d.* per Pound, how he imagines the Seller had it, when the bare Du-

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ty amounts to more; he will readily answer; That he has no Business to care about that, for he'll buy his Goods as cheap as he can. And so he may; and not one in a Hundred, but will do the like; nor have we any Business, as the Case now stands, to enquire into the Matter at all; the Difference in the Trade at this Time, is no greater, than for one to give 5 *d.* per Pound for the same Commodity, as another gives 10 *d.*

Every Seaman in the Tobacco-Service, to make the most of his Wages, has been always for buying an agreeable Quantity of Tobacco abroad, to make the best Advantage of it at Home; which he would be at a Loss to do in the accustomed Way, if the Buyer of the Leaf were accountable. It must be allow'd, if such a Trade might be admitted, it would be Pity but those Seamen had the Advantage, who take much Pains for what they get; but what one may do, ten thousand may do, and every Man in the Kingdom; therefore it may not be allow'd to any.

In Wines, the clandestine Part is play'd to a more considerable Advantage, than that

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that of Tobacco, notwithstanding there may be none run or stolen throughout the Kingdom in seven Years. But the Inconveniencies incurred by this Commodity, are the Consequence of the Works of those dark Places the Cellars. The continual and vast Mixtures of Cyder, and other Commodities more unwholesome, with that which has paid a Duty, is notoriously evident. It's not at all to be disputed, when a Gentleman calls for a Bottle of Wine at a Tavern, &c. he pays its due Price, as Wine that hath paid its Duty. Should not the Commodity then be agreeable to its Price? Let the Mixtures be ever so wholesome, no Matter for that; tho' perhaps it's not always so neither: But I'll not willingly pay for what I have not, or, perhaps, four Times the Value of it; nor should I willingly give for *British* Brandy, the Price of *French*; or for Small-Beer, the Price of Strong. According to the best of my Judgment, it would be useful, to put a Stop to these Irregularities in Wines, as well as those belonging to Tobacco, nor can I, for the Reasons propos'd, but imagine the Promoters

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Promoters of a Scheme to prevent such Frauds, deserve the Commendation of every honest Person in the Kingdom.

The Scare-Crow Inventions of our Cunning-Ones, to set People a madding, will not do with every body; they entirely lose their Success with some, as it may be hop'd, they will with every body in Time, that are willing to make the best of their Reason. The constant procuring Permits and Night-Surveys, are frightful Things to think of, it's certain; for all Second Dealers, or Cutters of Tobacco, Permits are necessary to send away with Goods of any considerable Quantity; yet notwithstanding this, and all other Grievances that can be nam'd, a sufficient Amends would be made for them all by the proposed Scheme, in the Consequences that would follow. But who are they that are to be disturbed in the Night, except those that work? And who are they, were the Truth known, that have been full of Complaints against Excise-Officers for Time past, but such as have been most guilty. If a just Scrutiny could be made into the Affair, it would appear, to one

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Injury incurr'd by an Exciseman, fifty Defrauds have been committed upon the Dues of the Crown. I'll appeal to the Brewers and Distillers of *London*, than which there are but few finer Employments, whether any Trouble is ever given by the Excise, to the real Prejudice of their Business? Indeed, suspicious Persons are narrowly look'd into, as they ought to be. As the Case is now, without any new Order in the Excise, there is scarce a private House in the Kingdom, but upon a strong Suspicion, is liable to the Inspection of either Excisemen, or Officers of the Custom-House. Are any of the Employments now under the constant Inspection of Excisemen, fearful of having their Mysteries discover'd? or was there ever such a Thing thought of before? There's a great a Mystery in Brewing, in Distilling, in making Soap or Candles, and more too, than in Tobacco. The same Arguments will equally hold good against all Excises whatsoever, as are brought against that under Consideration: And it would certainly fit easier on Tradesmen of many Kinds, if there

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there were Occasion for none: But as the Matter is with us, we ought, as much as possible, to be made equal Sharers in the Disadvantages, as well as the Advantages of Trade.

The Profits accruing Yearly to the Crown, would be much augmented, were the Schemes concerning *Tobacco* and *Wine* to take Place; yet no Fair Trader would be any ways a Sufferer, but in many Respects, such would be Gainers; some Duties which lie hardest on the *Poor* might be entirely taken off, and the Government still a Gainer. By which we may see what a Trade there has been drove, equally prejudicial to King and Subjects. There are many fair Dealers in *Tobacco*, as I suppose there are some in *Wines*; but be they in a Capacity to deal either small, or more largely, they are liable to be basely under-sold, and ruin'd into the Bargain, notwithstanding the Pains daily taken to keep themselves upon the Old Lay. The Justness of the Cause I have been pleading, is as clear to me as the Sun at Noon-day; and every impartial Trader in the Kingdom

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dom is desir'd, as it would be better for him to enquire judicially into the true Case, rather than to run hastily into the Way of a mad bewitch'd Multitude.

The Wisdom of our Parliament is apparently great, in deferring the *Tobacco-Bill* to a longer Time than usual, for a second Hearing, notwithstanding the Desert of the Bill for the Sanction of a Law. And although the Right of Petitioning belongs to the meanest Subject in the Kingdom, our Caballing Gentlemen should distinguish between Petitioning, and Rioting, or Insulting. Must our Parliament, or any Member thereof, be oblig'd to follow the Dictates of a Mob, or else to endanger Life or Limb? May not this be esteem'd a worthy Precedent for future Times? Thus may it as well be in any other Case: If a certain Party of Men should dislike a Matter under Consideration, it must be therefore laid down: It should be consider'd, how injurious it may prove to the Peace of the Nation in general, to encourage Mobs; we have too many already forward enough of them-

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themselves to those kind of Works, not only among the Ignorant, but among some that know better. Nevertheless, it may be hoped, by our future Conduct, we may continue in the Enjoyment of that *Peace* which we have long enjoy'd. And it is also my hearty Wish, that an Alteration may be made in the Duties belonging to *Wines* and *Tobaccoes*, that His Majesty may have the Benefit of his Just Dues; that Trading Subjects may have a general and equal Share in the Advantages and Disadvantages of Trade; that no Man may be made to pay for what he hath not, nor suffer in his Health, by the Use of a Corrupted Commodity.

From the general Inspection I have made into the Affair, it appears to me, that, excepting the *Members of either House*, there's not One in a Hundred against the Alteration propos'd, but are either dishonest in their Intentions, or perfectly ignorant of its true Meaning.

F I N I S.