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LETTER

TO A

*Member of PARLIAMENT*

Concerning the

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FOR

Preventing the Growth of SCHISM.

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By RICHARD STEELE, Esq;

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The SECOND EDITION.

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# LETTER

TO A

## Member of PARLIAMENT.

S I R,

*London, May 28. 1714.*

**T**HOUGH I have had the Misfortune to appear an unworthy Member of your House, and am expelled, accordingly, from my Seat in Parliament, I am not by that Vote (which was more important to the People of *England* than I shall at this Time explain) deprived of the common Benefits of Life, Liberty, or any other Enjoyment of a rational Being. And I do not think I can better bestow my Time, or employ these Advantages, than in doing all in my Power to preserve them to others as well as my self, and in asserting the Right of my Fellow Subjects against any thing which I apprehend to be an Encroachment upon what they ought to enjoy as Men, and what they are legally possessed of as *Englishmen*; or, if you will, as *Britons*.

This, Sir, is all the Apology I shall make to you for addressing to you in this publick Manner my Thoughts concerning the Bill, now making its Way with all convenient Expedition through your House and the whole

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Legislature.

Legiflature. I fhall examine this Matter as well as Haste will allow me, and therefore muft recite as diftinctly as I can what you gave me in Difcourfe as the Subftance of this intended Law, to wit,

THAT whereas by an Act of Parliament, in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Years of his late Majesty King Charles the Second, intituled, *An Act for the Uniformity of Publick Prayers, and the Administration of the Sacrament, and other Rites and Ceremonies; and for Establishing the Form of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating Bishops, Priests and Deacons in the Church of England*; it is among other Things enacted, that every School-Master keeping any Publick or Private School, and every Person Instructing and Teaching any Youth or Private Family, as a Tutor or School-Master, should subscribe before his or their Respective Bishop, or Archbishop, or Ordinary of the Diocess, a Declaration or Acknowledgment, in which among other Things is contained as follows, --- viz. *I A. B. do declare, that I will conform to the Liturgy of the Church of England, as it is now by Law Establish'd. --- And if any School-Master or other Person instructing or teaching Youth in any Private School or Family as a Tutor or School-Master, before License obtain'd from the Respective Archbishop or Ordinary of the Diocess, according to the Laws and Statutes of this Realm, for which he should pay 12d. only, and before Subscription and Acknowledgment made as aforesaid; then every such School-Master or other instructing or teaching as aforesaid, should for the first Offence suffer Three Months Imprisonment without Bail, and for every second, and other such Offence, should suffer Three Months Imprisonment without Bail or Mainprize, and also forfeit to his Majesty the Sum of 5l.* And whereas notwithstanding the said Act, Sundry Papists and other Persons dissenting from the Church of England, have taken upon them to Instruct and Teach

Teach Youth as Tutors and School-Masters, and have set up Schools and Seminaries for the Education of several Persons, in Reading, Scholastick, Academical or other Literature. Whereby, if due and speedy Remedy be not had, great Danger might ensue to this Church and State. For the making the said recited Act more effectual, and for preventing the Danger aforesaid, Be it enacted by the Queen's most Excellent, &c. That every Person or Persons who shall from and after the Day of next ensuing, keep any Publick or Private School or Seminary, or Teach or Instruct any Youth as Tutor or School-Master, or School-Mistress, in Reading, Scholastick, Academical, or other Literature, within that Part of Great Britain called England, the Dominion of Wales, or Town of Berwick upon Tweed, before such Person or Persons shall have subscribed the Declaration or Acknowledgment before recited, and shall have had and obtain'd a License from the Respective Archbishop or Bishop, or Ordinary of the Place, under his Seal of Office, for which the Party shall pay and no more; and in Case such Person or Persons shall be thereof convicted by the Oath of or more credible Witnesses or Witnesses, before any or more Justice or Justices of the Peace within any County, Riding, City, or Town Corporate, where such Offence shall be committed in that Part of Great Britain called England; which Oath such Justice or Justices are hereby impowered and required to Administer, and shall, and may. Provided always, and be it hereby enacted, That no License shall be granted by any Archbishop, Bishop, or Ordinary, unless the Person or Persons who sue for the same, shall produce a Certificate of his, her, or their having received the Sacrament according to the Usage of the Church of England, in some Parish-Church with- in



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The first Thing that occurs to me on this Occasion, is, That by the Act of Union, the Churches of *England* and *Scotland* are equally exempted from any Innovation. The Schism seems to be too Geographical, for as the whole united Kingdom is equally under the Care of the Parliament, it seems a great Omission, that Dissenters in the North Part of *Britain* should not be as much discouraged as they are in the South: According to Justice, Episcopal Clergy should be under the same Disadvantages in *Scotland*, as Dissenting-Teachers are in *England*. But let us, according to the Bill, keep to Schism on this Side the *Tweed*.

By this Bill, without Regard to any thing done in favour of the Dissenters in the Reign of K. *William*, (who by the Way was as much King of *England* as K. *Charles*) this Act of King *Charles* the Second, of Pious Memory, is professedly supported, and certain Breaches against it urged as a Reason for bringing in this. In the first Year of King *William* and Queen *Mary*, of ever blessed and glorious Memory, an Act passed to exempt the Protestant Subjects dissenting from certain Laws; among which certain Laws, is recited this of the 13th and 14th of King *Charles* the Second.

This Act therefore, in a stealing and too artful a manner, takes away the Toleration of Dissenters; for the Force of it is directed to take place in Confirmation of a Law which they are expressly defended against by the said Act of Toleration. Is this done like Neighbour to Neighbour? Like *Englishman* to *Englishman*? Give me leave to tell you, *Sir*, tho' you Senators may do what you please to one another, may do what you please with the Persons of your own Members, we without Doors know you to be only our Attorneys, and that you are not sent thither to impose your Angers, Passions, or Prejudices, upon particular Persons or Parties, but to propose calmly and impartially, according to the Rules of natural and civil Right, Matters which may be for the Benefit of the whole

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whole Kingdom. Now, *Sir*, I say, if the Purpose of this Bill be to deprive the Dissenters of the Liberty of receiving Instructors into their Families, or publick School-masters or School-mistresses but under the above-mentioned Restrictions, this Bill is to deprive them of all Right, both Natural, Religious, and Civil.

It is inconsistent with the Natural and Original Right of Mankind; for it is an undoubted Truth, that Men have as much Right to the Means of Knowledge as to the Means of Life: To abridge Men (where there is no Guilt) of a Natural Right, by a small Penalty, is as unjust, tho' not as cruel, as to abridge them of such Right by a greater Penalty. And you may, with equal Justice, take away the Lives of the Dissenters, as punish the Dissenters in their Liberty or their Estates for instructing Children their own way.

This is a Step of the highest Degree of Violation, and there can be no Progress further but cutting their Throats; it is going much faster than our Neighbour Nation went in the like Design. By the Edict of *Nantes* in *France*, the *Hugonots* had Liberty of Conscience and Toleration; by that Edict they had Universities of their own, namely, *Sedan* and *Saumur*. These subsisted till a little while before the Revocation of the Edict. Private Schools subsisted to the last. Protestants might breed their Children with Papists if they would, but Papists were discouraged if they sent their Children to Protestants; but still Protestants might educate their Children their own way; so if you please it may be here. It is enough for our Church to let Dissenters educate no Children but their own, and if they will send their Children to us for Education, they may be welcome; further to go is against all natural Justice.

As to Religious Right, our Blessed Saviour and his Apostles neither used or directed any other Means against Gain-sayers than Evidence; and we are often told from the Pulpit by our best Divines, that in the  
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first Centuries, all Apologies for the Christian Religion constantly insisted on this as a Fundamental Truth, That it was unlawful to restrain Men from the Means of Instruction in the different Forms of Religion. It is against the Interest of the Church of *England*, as it is a Protestant Church in general; for it is the Characteristick of Protestant Churches to admit with all Candour the Liberty of studying the Scriptures, and consequently of teaching and being taught them. The Scriptures (by being open to Men who are not allowed to Commune with others upon them, and learn from whom they please with all Freedom) may serve only to aggravate their Guilt in conforming to what they in their Consciences may think Criminal. The Design of the Toleration-Act was to give Ease to scrupulous Consciences; that supposes there are Men who think they cannot in Conscience Communicate with us, and this Disability (*of which the Dissenter himself is the only Judge*) is a sufficient Ground for Indulgence to him.

If a Man cannot in Conscience himself Communicate, he will think himself obliged to alarm his Son against our Errours. What a Man thinks the best way to Heaven, it would be monstrous not to shew his Child; and if he is debarred from that, he is persecuted in a Circumstance more grievous to him, than if he were to suffer in Reputation, Fortune, Limb or Life. The Question is not whether he is mistaken; he labours under that Mistake, and for his Sins in that (if he does not disturb the Publick Peace) he is accountable to God. But still it is his Belief.

The Government, as I said, if it thinks fit, may hinder him from propagating his Opinion among those who conform to the Church; but it cannot with Reason and Justice, and therefore cannot at all, hinder him from serving God his own way, and educating his Children in the same.

The *Mahometans* are as much persuaded of the Truth of what they Profess, as Men can be; and yet, generally speaking, they suffer the *Greeks*, and *Armenians*, to breed their Children their own Way. What Allowance God will give Erroneous Consciences, it is not our Business to Enquire; but as an Erroneous may be a sincere Conscience, we should be Barbarous in pretending to Oppress or put Hardships upon it: The Welfare of their Children is as dear to the Dissenters, as their own; and if Men would make it their own Case, it would not require a moment's Thought to determine, in favour of this Unhappy, threatened People.

Now as to Civil Right. As *Englishmen*, they are possessed of a Law in their Favour, which indulges them in the Exercise of their Religion; and where there is a Right to a Benefit, there are supposed to go along with it, the necessary means of attaining that Right; These Means are intercepted, when Education towards enjoying this Right is prohibited. The plain and fair method of doing what is intended by this Act, had been to have numbered the Dissenters, and to have made a Law, that none should dissent from the Church, after the Decease of the Persons mentioned in a following List, and so to have named all the present Schismatics, for bidding single Persons among them to Marry, till they had Conformed. This had been perhaps more Offensive at first View, but it had not been so Injurious as this Bill will appear, upon Reflection; For it is a much less Evil, to prevent the Encrease of Mankind, than to debar them of their Natural, Religious, and Civil Rights, after they are come into the World.

But let us consider this matter more closely, and examine this Bill, *First*, as it may affect the Tranquility  
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of the Nation in General: And *Secondly*, as it will affect the Prosperity of the Church of *England*, for the Safety and Benefit of which it is pretended to be calculated.

As to the Publick Peace, it will naturally bring that into the utmost Distraction, by alienating the Affections of Families, Neighbourhoods, and Corporations from each other, by Ten thousand little Incidents, which cannot be provided against, or described: Conversation throughout the Kingdom will turn upon this Subject; and this People, the Dissenters, as well as those who have any Compassion for them, will be marked out, to be the Scorn and Derision of those who are averse to them; and they, on the other side, will be filled with Rage and Indignation against such their Adversaries.

Men who are old enough to remember the manner of Executing the Laws formerly Enacted against the Dissenters, will inform you, that Constables attended by Guards, and Commission-Officers at the Head of Files of Armed Men, used to visit Meetings, and conduct the poor Wretches to Goals, for calling upon and worshipping God their own way. Let any one read the Tryal of *Pen and Mead*, and he will see the Spirit of those Days: The whole Nation was made up of Criminals and Accusers, and both believed they were doing Service to God. But as this Bill is in it self to the last degree Cruel, even such as it is, it is not preserved so well against a Licentious Execution of it, as the Law directs in less Cases.

However well disposed Ministers and Officers may be, it is for the Good of Mankind, to put as many Checks against an Arbitrary Exercise of Power as possible; but this Bill puts the whole Body of Dissenters under such  
Persons,

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Persons, as may be pick'd out, by one Officer of State, to Exercise it in the most Summary and Passionate manner.

According to this Bill, if, in any future Reign, a Chancellor should be an Enemy to that distressed People, he may bring a Persecution upon them, by naming proper Sets of Justices of the Peace, and himself fit well excused from their Irregularities; for tho' he might know it in their Tempers to be violent, he is not accountable for their Practice, nor are they themselves in terrour of Appeals, for Arbitrary Conduct. There are Squires enough in this Kingdom, ready to distress Presbyterians with the utmost Rigour, tho' they know no more why they are angry with a Presbyterian, than a Turkey-Cock why it raises its Crest at a Man whistling at him. They are bred in a Prejudice against them, and will fall upon them with as little Consideration, as Beasts of Prey do on those Animals, which Instinct prompts them to Seize.

Such Judges as these this Bill would give a Court Power to appoint, for pronouncing the last Decision in Cases of the highest Consequence, tho' the Law gives an Appeal from them in the lowest Disputes of Property!

Now let us consider how this Bill will affect the Church of *England*. It will bring upon it great and unanswerable Scandal. It will give Arguments to her Enemies, that she is conscious of her Inability to defend her self by Reason and Truth, when she flies to the Secular Power to take off her Dissenters. It will carry in it all the Guilt which we object against the *Roman* Catholics, in founding her Power in the blind Obedience of the People, and not in the Conviction of their Minds.

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When we have done this, and used Force in our gaining Profelytes, why should not the Church of *Rome*, which has more Force, employ it all in reducing us, who are, they say, Schismatics from them? Can any thing be juster than to make Us suffer, what We in the same case impose on others? Add to this, we shall prosecute them for omitting what our Church cannot pronounce Necessary to Salvation; the *Roman* Catholics would assault Us for what they think Damnable, and what they think they are obliged, in Conscience, to avenge and extirpate.

The Dissenters have a Law made in their Favour, since which there has been also Care taken, by another Law, to prevent their Capacity from any share of Power to give us Disturbance. What have they done, to make it needful to take further Securities against them? If they have done nothing, it is the utmost Barbarity to take any Right from Men, who have committed no Offence: Have our own Clergy remonstrated, that this is Necessary for their Interest or Safety? Do they say they are too busie in debauching their Flocks? Do our Universities say, their Academies breed Men too hard for them in Dispute? Do not Dissenters pay Dues and Tithes like the rest of their Congregations, tho' they maintain also Pastors in their own Way? Can we not believe them to act Conscientiously, when they are contented to have no part in the Honours and Profits from the Service of their Country, and put themselves also to double Expence to enjoy their Religion?

This is a most extraordinary Point, at this time of Day; When other Nations are plagued with Inquisitions and Ecclesiastical Tyranny, shall we from the Example of their Misery set up, or make a step towards such Ty-

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rannies? Shall we at this time offer to make a Complement to the most Pure, Learned, and Apostolick Church in the World, of unjust Means to subdue their Opponents? Will you not at least have the Sense of the Convocation, now Sitting, before you take Measures to the Impeachment of their Reputation as Casuists?

But to use Force is not the way to subdue them; it is against Nature and common Sense to think they are to be gained by such Methods. Good-will opens the way to Men's Hearts, and the Toleration has thinned Presbyterian Assemblies more than any rigid Means could ever have done. No Man is persuaded by him who hates him, but all are easily prevailed upon by those who love 'em. The Dissenters are quite another kind of People, than they were before the Toleration. By this Indulgence to them, it is a known Observation, that they are brought into the Methods of Life in common with the best and most polite People, and Crowds of the Generations which have grown up under the Toleration have conformed to the Church, from the Humanity of that Law. The Fathers of Families have, perhaps, found some Pain in retracting their Errors, and in going into new Communities and Conversations; but we see thousands connive at the Conformity of their Children, the Parents have been secretly pleased at their Sliding into that Oeconomy, for which the Fear of the Imputation of Self-interest, or Apostacy prevented them in their own Persons to declare.

And yet all of a sudden, without any manner of Provocation, a Million of her Majesty's Subjects are to have the Law, by which they enjoy the dearest Blessings of Life, taken from them. An Act that will certainly gain to us all that are not worth having, and make those who are animated by Virtue and Piety more averse to us.

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They will have a juster Exception against us from this very Act than they had before. Kind Treatment every Day brought new Profelytes amongst us, and they were insensibly wrought into our Sentiments; but either as Men, or as Christians, they must abhor the thought of adhering to us out of Fear. This Motive is in it self a faulty one, for resigning not only any Tenet of Religion, but of common Obligation. Passive Obedience is said to be a Doctrine of the Church of *England*, but it is a terrible Article to be made the first in the Catechism, as it would be to those who are to come in upon Compulsion.

When we consider the putting this Law in Execution, there cannot be a more pleasant Image presented to the Imagination, than a poor Schismatick School-Mistress brought before a zealous angry Squire for transgressing this Act, and teaching one Presbyterian, yet little more than an Animal, in what the Letter *D* differed from the Letter *B*; maliciously insinuating to another Schismatick aged five Years old, without Licence from the Ordinary, that *O* is round; and not contenting her self with merely showing to the said Schismaticks the Letters of a certain Book covered with Horn; but instructing the said Hereticks to put them together, and make Words of them; as appears by the Affidavit of one who heard one Infant Schismatick say, *o f, of*, another *o b, ob*.—Prodigious! that a Church adorned with so many Excellent and Learned Members, supplied by two famous Universities, both endowed with ample Revenues, Immunities, and Jurisdictions, should be affronted with the offer of being reinforced with Penal Laws against the Combination of Women and Children! You might with the same Propriety provide against Schismatick Nurfses.

This

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This Act seems such a Violation of Natural Justice, that it may be made a Question whether it ought to oblige, after it is enacted. I am sure it is such, that if the Dissenters are to consider whether they will obey it, or fly into another Nation, they must chuse the latter; and Lands untenanted, or Tenants disabled by the loss of half a Million of People, will be sensibly felt by the Incumbents on small Livings. Now I have mentioned small Livings, Why does no Body represent, that in *Wales*, and some Parts of *England*, Men in Holy Orders are forced to subsist with an Income below that of Day-Labourers? Why do not you, while you are courting the Clergy, help this particular? If you go on in such Designs as these, will it not Suffice? No: this would be nothing but Charity and Piety, and would carry no Point for those of the Clergy who affect Power and Grandeur, and lend the Word *Church* to promote Secular Ends, to the Disparagement of God's Holy Word of which they are unworthy Dispencers.

It is possible Bishops that are given to Preaching, and Ministers who are in earnest in their sacred Calling, would be enough obliged by such Acts in favour of their Indigent Brethren; but what would that do towards pulling down what they call *the Faction*? Godly Clergymen can't do that Service which is necessary; Self-denial, Meekness and Charity are too slow Instruments for Men of Dispatch and Business.

But it is to be hoped the Fallacy of using the Pretence of the Church in Cases which are so far from promoting Religion, that they scandalize and disparage it, will be thoroughly understood, before such a destructive Bill, as this, can go through any Part of the Legislature; tho' if it should,  
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it is still to be hoped Her Majesty will confirm to herself the Love and Affection of all who have a true Sense of Religion, by rejecting a Bill so terrible to scrupulous Consciences, and which can be serviceable to none but such as have no Sense of Conscience at all, such as have so entirely forgotten what it is that they have no Notion of the Compunctions it may give others.

No Man can exert himself on a more worthy, or more important Occasion, than in Opposition to this Bill; and if it is at last rejected by Her Majesty, she will do as great a Service to true Piety, and the Interests of the Church, as Queen *Esther* did, when she averted the Extirpation of the *Jews*.

He that will in the least reflect, can have no room to believe, that the Interest of Religion can be advanced by this Bill. Therefore as it cannot truly concern the Church to have it take place, let us see a little how the passing of it into a Law would be Useful to the State.

The great Points to be considered at this Juncture in debating on any publick Circumstance, is how the matter before us will regard the House of *Hannover*, or the Pretender.

It has been already observed, that this Proceeding against our Protestant Brethren may be a fatal Example to the *Roman* Catholick World, to join its whole Force to suppress Us.

If we look upon the Places distant from the Court: We have undoubted Intelligence, that there are Men carried away every Day out of *Ireland* for the Service of the Chevalier

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valier at *Bar-le-Duc*: That several of the Clans in *Scotland* seem to expect with impatience his Arrival in that Part of the Kingdom, in Hopes of Ravaging the Estates of Gentlemen, remarkable for their Zeal to the House of *Hanover*. If you please to consult the Members for that Part of *Britain*, they will not dissemble their Fears on this Occasion. This Pretender himself is still at *Bar-le-Duc*, notwithstanding the repeated Instances to remove him; and the King of *France*, his antient Friend and Patron, is so little careful to manage it decently towards Us, that he does not only suffer him to stay at *Bar-le-Duc*, but in further Contempt of us, the Great Monarch is building an Harbour at *Mardyke*, to serve in the same stead, that *Dunkirk* did heretofore.

Now when there are these melancholly Prospects before our Eyes; when no one of the Family of *Hanover*, tho' long expected, is yet arrived in this Kingdom; and when many Weak People are under strange Apprehensions, because the Proclamation for bringing the Pretender to Justice, in case he should Land here, is put off; I say, when many things pass every Day on which *Jacobites* make Reflections to their own Advantage, and ordinary People, who cannot judge of Reasons of State, put all these things together, it creates in them a Chagrin and Uneasiness, which will be mightily encreased by the passing a Bill that may be to the Mortification of the meanest Persons in the Protestant Cause.

It is therefore no time to do a thing, which will take off the Hands and Purfes of Half a Million of People, as Friends to the House of *Hanover*; Half a Million of Peoples, as Enemies to the Pretender.

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If this Bill passes, and the Pretender should come upon our Coast, I would fain know what could move a Dissenter to lift an Hand, or employ a Shilling against Him? He has at present no hopes of Preferment, and would by this Bill be under daily Apprehensions of the loss of the Toleration, as to himself, as well as being wholly bereft of it as to his Posterity. He would have certainly Promises from the Pretender of Liberty of Conscience, and he could but have those Promises broken, as in this Case he would have it to say they had been before, and must expect some Sweetnesses at a new Change for standing Neuter, or exerting himself for the Invader. Thus he would rather, according to his own Interest, wish an Invader Success than Disappointment; add to this, some Pleasure in the revengeful Hope of seeing us, who had Persecuted him, fall into the same Calamity.

This, dear Sir, is all I have to trouble you with on this Occasion; and tho' you accused me of being cast down with my Expulsion, you see I have not Dunn'd you to move, that the other Pamphlets may be examined, as well as the *Crisis* and the *Englishman*. Give my Service to poor Tom and Ned. I must confess they were the last I forgave, but I have forgiven them too now. I am thoroughly convinced, since this Bill, that I was not worthy: For now you have taken upon you Ecclesiastical Matters, and I should not have known how to behave my self among you as a Communion of Saints.

I doubt not, Sir, but your Voice and excellent Talents will be employed against this pernicious Bill: To oppose it strenuously, will be worthy that Resolution and Modesty for which you are so remarkably conspicuous, that

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that Modesty which cannot incline you to bear hard against Persons or Things, when you happen to be with a Majority, and that Resolution which prompts you to assert what you think Truth, tho' under the Disadvantage of the most inconsiderable Minority.

*I am, S I R,*

*Your most Obedient,*

*Obliged, Humble Servant,*

**Richard Steele.**

Just Published,

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Suis & ipsa Roma viribus ruit. Hor.

Printed for J. Roberts near the Oxford Arms in Warwick-Lane.

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