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A  
LETTER

FROM A

Member of Parliament, &c.

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[Price Sixpence.]

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**LETTER**  
 FROM A  
**Member of PARLIAMENT**  
 FOR A  
**Borough in the West,**  
 TO A  
 Noble LORD in his Neighbourhood  
 there, concerning the **Excise-Bill,**  
 and the Manner and Causes of  
 losing it.



L O N D O N:  
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A

# LETTER

FROM A

Member of PARLIAMENT, &c.



OUR Lordship remembers well, how grossly the name of the *Church* was prostituted and abused, about twenty Years ago, to cover the Ends of a mad Faction, who whilst they raged against the Cause of Liberty, which is always the Cause of God, were ready to overthrow the Religion and Government of their Country, under the Character of *Englishmen* and *Churchmen*. Nay, they confidently pretended to be the

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only

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only *true Churchmen*; tho' if their Words, their avowed Principles, their public Writings and Actions had any Meaning, their evident Aim was *Slavery* and the *Pretender*. But though every thinking Man saw this, the Multitude saw it not; and being bewitched with the Cry of the *Church*, approved and promoted all the Mischief and Violence committed under that pious Cloak.

I, my Lord, have seen another venerable Word strangely mistaken and abused in a late Instance here, I mean the Word *Liberty*, which in my humble Opinion has been more than *taken in vain*; and the *Sound* of it manifestly perverted to banish the *Substance*; as by that Sound public Tumults and false Terrors have been raised against that great Bulwark of Liberty, the *Freedom* and *Independency of Parliament*.

I am so full of this ill-boding Event, and so much affected by it, as what I apprehend to be entirely subversive of all Liberty, that I cannot help troubling your Lordship with a few Observations about it. Your Lordship came into public Life possessed with all the rational Notions of Liberty; and tho' you have for many Years retired from attending in Parliament, you have the Interest

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rest of your Country as much at heart as any Man in Parliament or out of it.

Before I left your Neighbourhood to come to my Seat in the House of Commons, I had seen so many Papers full of the Danger and Terrors of a *General Excise*, that with all the Allowance which I usually make for the Partiality and Design of such Papers, I could not help being a little alarmed by them; the more for that I saw no Answer made to them in other Papers. From whence I inferred, that the whole was not Invention, though a great part of it might be so; and thus I came to Parliament in a Disposition far from favourable to the Court with regard to the Project on foot. As I have no Employment, I could not be influenced by those who bestow Employments and can take them away; and as I never shall take an Employment, I could not be prejudiced by the want of one. Neither have I any other Motive to please or sowre me, no Authority or Dependance, from Kindred, or Friends, in Place or out of Place. So that if I am subject to Mistake, it can be only from want of Discernment.

Before I left the Country, we were alarmed with a Design of *new Taxes*. By the present Bill no *new Tax* was laid, but only

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only a better Method propos'd of gathering an old Tax; by which Change a Saving to the Public was intended, sufficient to ease the Land. The Design at least was noble and benevolent; and the Design of a new Tax appears a wicked Falshood. The chief Objections therefore lay against the Method, the Method of an Excise upon Wine and Tobacco. And here I will venture to say, that in no Bill whatsoever, either for Excise, or for any other Duty, was there ever such great Tenderness and Regard shewn to the Ease and Security of the Subject. Several of the former Laws of Excise were softened; and new Clauses added to check Excise Officers. The *Commission of Appeal* was taken away; and *three Judges* from *Westminster-Hall* were appointed to try any Dispute between the Commissioners of the Excise-Office and the Traders. And in case of Informations upon Oath before a Justice of the Peace, for searching private Houses for Excised Commodities; (which Informations no Justice of the Peace could before refuse, any more than he could refuse granting his Warrant pursuant to such Information) it was now left to his Judgment and Discretion, whether he believed the Oath of the Informer; and he was at Liberty to grant or not to grant his Warrant.

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rant. Nor has any Officer Power by this Bill to enter into any private House, or into any private Room in public Houses, but upon such Information and Warrant; and upon such Information and Warrant, any Custom-house Officer may already enter there.

But the contrary of all this was confidently asserted, and greedily believed: Nor was there any Reading or Believing, but on one Side. The Multitude frightened by false Stories, and blindly following their Demagogues, run like a Current one way. Besides the regular Infatuation from daily and weekly papers, little *Hand Bills* were dispersed by thousands all over the City and Country, put into Peoples Hands in the Streets and Highways, dropped at their Doors, and thrown in at their Windows; all asserting that Excisemen were (like a foreign Enemy) going to invade and devour them, and ready to enter their Houses; into all Houses, private or public, at any time, by Day, or by Night. They might as well have asserted, that these Excisemen were to be invested with Power of Life and Death.

Such as could not read, were informed by such as could; and all were ready to  
B inform,

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inform, and mislead, and enrage one another. It was the Theme of Coffee-Houses, Taverns, and Gin-shops, the Discourse of Artificers, the Cry of the Streets, the Entertainment of Lacquies, the Prate of Wenches, and the Bugbear of Children.

Of all these, scarce one understood a word of the Matter, nor would understand: It was common to hear Men, otherwise very reasonable Men, declare that they would read nothing on t'other Side. What wonder then if the Vulgar and the Many were totally bewitched? If you were to represent the thing truly to one of these angry People, (and angry most of them were) he would not credit you; nay, probably affront you. Some of them carried this obstinate Perseverance in a Mistake so far, as to swear, that they would not believe that the Bill had one *restraining Clause* in it, though they saw it there. No: We were all to be delivered, Men, Women and Children, bound Hand and Foot, to Bands of Excisemen.

Even the Number of these terrible Excisemen was not to exceed one hundred and fifty, not three to a County; yet were to

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to enslave all *England*! What strange Mockery and Abuse of Words! What Strength does or can a Poor Exciseman add to the Crown? Nay, the Crown by this Scheme must have lost a great Number of very considerable Officers, I mean the *Receivers General* of the several Counties; of which Officers every County hath one, some more, generally Men of Condition, and of great Influence over all the Freeholders in *England*, from being Masters of Money, and of Power to distress or spare such a vast Body of Men.

Nor by this Bill was an Exciseman in the Country Towns to visit any Houses which Excisemen do not commonly visit already; since such as sell Tobacco, do likewise sell Tea, Coffee, and Chocolate, Commodities long since subject to Excise: And all the Inns being visited by Excisemen, as they brew Beer, could find no Hardship in being visited for Wine too.

But pray, my Lord, where is the Slavery, or even Hardship, that Excisemen have a Privilege given them by Law to enter publick Shops and Cellars, where Footmen, Porters, Cobblers, Tapsters, and all sorts of People are entering every Mo-



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ment of the Day, and are therefore public and open, that they may be entered? Nor does an Exciseman require any separate Attendance from the public Dealers, whose Business it is to be in the way, attending their own Affairs, and serving their Customers.

Besides, are these Men to do nothing for the Government which protects them? If it be Slavery to contribute such Assistance, I doubt all Government, and every Law that is made infers Slavery; because all Government and all Laws imply Powers and Privileges necessary to their Support and Execution; and it is scarce possible to execute any Law without hurting Particulars.

The whole of the Question seems to lye here, whether the whole People of *England* had better maintain one hundred and fifty Excisemen at fifty pounds a Year a-piece, or the Freeholders of *England* continue to pay half a Million yearly for ever; whether the whole People ought to pay seven or eight thousand pounds a year, or part of the People pay five hundred thousand pounds a year. And even these Excisemen would be paid out of the Pockets of Knaves, by curing the Frauds notoriously

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riously committed. But the poor Landholder must be doomed to groan and pay, rather than Shopkeepers and Innkeepers be visited by Excisemen, though they be already visited by Excisemen, and rather than the fraudulent Dealer shall be *enslaved* by *common Justice*.

Doubtless Your Lordship would laugh at such wild Inconsistencies, were not the Subject in its Consequences too serious and affecting. Many things occur upon this Affair surprizing enough. One amongst the rest is, that some Gentlemen who laid on former Excises, Excises upon the Necessaries of Life, upon Commodities of our own Production, Excises still subsisting, upon *Soap, Candles, and Leather*, were the most zealous Opposers of the Excise upon *Wine and Tobacco*. I do not even hear that they at all condemn or censure themselves for being the Authors of the other and more severe Excise, or call the Law by which they did it (as they do this) *a Badge of Slavery*. Such different Eyes and Conceptions have Men in Power and out of Power! Might not the People learn a useful Lesson from such contradictory Conduct, if the People ever would learn?

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With all the Cry of Taxes, let it be said to the Glory of his Majesties Reign, and to that of his Ministers, that there has not been *one new Tax* laid on in his Time. And as to the present intended *Alteration in the Revenue*, it was evidently calculated for the Benefit of the Public in General, calculated to ease one great part of the People, without laying any new Imposition upon the rest. The whole Saving and Advantage was to redound to the Public, and no part to his Majesty; since his part of the Duty was still to continue under the *Customs*.

What therefore could the Court or the Ministry gain by this Project, besides the Reputation of curing execrable Frauds, and of relieving the Land? What Influence or Service could accrue to the Ministry from two or three additional Excisemen in a County, especially when almost half the Number of considerable Officers of the Crown were to have been dropped, I mean the Receivers General of the Land-Tax? Let me observe, that by the *present Laws* of Customs and Excise, the *Commissioners of both*, or the *Commissioners of the Treasury* for the Time being,

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being, have Power to create *as many Officers as they please*.

The Ministers therefore would, in this View, have rather lost Strength than gained it by the Scheme: But as I still think it a worthy Project, and of great public Advantage, they could not have failed at last to have reaped a noble Harvest of Credit and Applause from it; and such public Credit being Strength, their Enemies foresaw it, and laboured to prevent it. I am sorry that they succeeded; perhaps one time or other they themselves may be sorry; the sooner too, for that they are not like to reap much Advantage from the present Success.

The Thing was lost for not being generally understood; and interested Men, supported by angry Men, prevailed, by raising false Alarms, which had been perfectly needless, had the Thing it self been alarming. If it was really a bad Bill, what occasion was there for falsifying the Design of it? And would it not have been sufficiently exposed by representing it as it was, without *Inventions* and *Aggravations*? But this would not answer the End; this would not have



have inflamed the People, nor perhaps warmed them. It would not have startled them, to have been told, " that " by preventing the Frauds of some " particular Men, all other Men would " have been benefited:" No: But it terrified them in good earnest, when they were persuaded, that they were upon the point of being devoured by a *General Excise*; that this *Great Dragon* would consume their Substance, and starve their Children; and that their Liberty and whole Fortunes were to be subjected to the Tyranny and Rapine of Excise-Officers. It was from such terrifying Representations as these that the People took Fire, and grew enraged at their *best Benefactors*, and fond of such as abused them.

Could there, my Lord, be greater or more inexcusable Wickedness, than such shameful Misrepresentations and Libels? It is certain, that by such Arts and Emissaries the popular Rage was first raised, and afterwards continually fed: Infomuch that the Thing it self about which the Multitude were terrified and mad, was generally no more understood than the Visions of *Jacob Behmen*, or any other mysterious and unmeaning  
Jargon:

Jargon: And when they met together in Numbers, it was not to reason, nor to inform one another of the Truth, but only to catch and promote the popular Falshood and Frenzy.

It somewhat resembles what I have heard your Lordship say of the *Romish* Priests abroad, who make the common People believe that the *Protestants* eat the Children of *Catholics*; and that since the Reformation, the *English* have the Faces, not of *Men*, but of *Dogs*. The Fright and Mistake here about this Bill of Excise was so strong and universal, that the Children began to be afraid of going to-bed, for fear that *Excisemen* should break in and *murder them by Night*.

My Lord, I never yet could learn how to reconcile this Practice of representing Things falsely, be they Things personal or Things public, to the Principles of Conscience and Honour. If I, for Example, by altering or curtailing a Man's Expression, make him say what he did not say, and thus turn his innocent Words into a guilty Sense; am I  
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not a manifest Falsifier? And what else is false Evidence or Imposture? And would the Man who thus hurts another Man's Character, spare taking away his Life by the same ill Means?

It has been boldly suggested, and the People have been made to believe, that none but *Creatures of Power, slavish and indigent Men*, such as lived by *Corruption*, and the *Bounty of Ministers*, were for *this Excise*. Perhaps there never was a more monstrous Conceit and Imposition. My Lord, Men, many Men, of as great Fortunes and as fair Characters, Men of as much Ability and Dignity as any in the three Kingdoms, were for it. Independent Men, some of them such as never had, never will have any Employment, Men of the greatest Figure in the Law, were for it; and many who have Places did not therefore vote for it because they have Places, but because they thought it reasonable. Or if there were any for it *because of their Places*, I might perhaps as truly say, that some were against it *because they had not Places*.

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He is a miserable Wretch indeed who, in Points that are essential or of moment, considers an Employment, any Employment, preferably to his Duty, his Country, and his Character. We see that several who have Places opposed this Scheme. This shews that private Opinion sometimes gets the better of a Place, as Resentment sometimes does of Opinion and Reason. Many of our angry Men had Places once. Did these Places influence them then? If not, why may not others be as honest as they?

I can likewise assure your Lordship of what you will easily conceive and believe, that many opposed the Excise, though they thoroughly approved it, some from Engagement to Party, some out of Resentment to Ministers, and several were apprehensive of popular Commotions, and the Consequences of such.

It has been asserted and published, over and over, that no Authorities of Merchants, or of such as understood

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Trade, and had written about it, could be produced in favour of Excises. Yet it is true, that the best Authorities that could be produced have been produced, the Authorities of the famous Pensioner *De Wit*, that of Mr. *Mun*, that of Sir *Josiah Child*, and that of Sir *Walter Raleigh*. These are all quoted in the *Appeal to the Landholders*, which I lately sent, with some other Papers on the same Subject, to your Lordship.

It is almost needless to mention, even in general, who they were who opposed the Excise, or from what Motives. Some doubtless did so from Conviction: Add to these all who gained by Frauds; all who governed Party, or were governed by it; all such as hated the Ministry, all such as wanted to be Ministers; all who were disappointed by one Side, all who had Hopes from the other; disaffected Writers, Coffee-house Orators, Makers and Spreaders of false News, busy Agents for the Pretender, Popish Priests, Tale-bearers, Ballad-Singers; all railing at Excise, misrepresenting  
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it, and asserting that it was to be *General*.

It signified nothing to answer, and ask, whether *every Thing* was to be excised, because *one or two Things* were? It availed not to say, that the *same Objection* would eternally lie against *any Tax whatsoever*, and that laying on *Four Shillings* in the Pound upon Land, inferred, by this Reasoning, the Necessity and Certainty of laying on *Twenty Shillings* in the Pound. I say this reasonable Answer signified nothing: The People were frightened and infatuated, and only listened to their own Fears and the Voice of Clamour. Their Imaginations had raised this same Excise into a hideous Phantom; and when the Brain is on fire, it is not Reason that can cool it.

This upon the whole, my Lord, was a Fit of general Madness, like that about *Sacheverel*. All Men now laugh at him and his Cause, and wonder why any Man could be for either, when the Ravings of that Mad-man, which he called Sermons, evidently struck at  
all

all Liberty whatsoever, Civil and Religious. But such is the Power of Party, which teaches Men not to reason but to rage. The Cry then was *against Liberty*; Tumults were raised, and Public Authority flighted and defy'd, in Defence of *Passive Obedience*. The Cry now is *for Liberty*, and such Combinations and Riots are raised, and such Violence is practis'd, as are threatening and fatal to Liberty. If Crowds direct the Legislature, and Laws are made or dropt by *Force or Fear*, what becomes of *Liberty*? But thus *good Words* are ever profaned, and wrested to cover and recommend *unrighteous Doings*.

They are the worst Enemies to *Liberty*, who turn it into *Wantonness*; and the beginning of *Slavery* is often *Licentiousness*. Liberty is a Sacred Thing, the great Ornament and Blessing of Human Society, which without it is a Gaol, or State of Bondage; and it is degraded and defiled when it is made the Cant and Sport of fierce and unruly Multitudes, who, however tenderly protected, kindly used,

used, and utterly unprovoked, complain of *Slavery*, when Laws are made to *prevent Frauds*, and rise in Thousands for fear of a few Score of Excisemen to be scattered up and down a great Nation.

This, my Lord, is too great Mockery. I never heard that these poor Fellows, the Excisemen, who are themselves the greatest Slaves in the Kingdom, laboriously employed, poorly paid, and severely curbed and ruled, ever attempted to insult the Persons of any Men, much less the Persons of Legislators and publick Ministers, or to pull down Houses, or to block up the Streets, or to rob or terrify peaceable Subjects. These were Acts of Oppression and Rage reserved for hot-headed Multitudes, who cry *Liberty*, but exercise *Tyranny*, and portend *Slavery*.

It is said these furious Crowds and their Excesses were not encouraged. My Lord, it is manifest they were encouraged: Circular Letters and Messages from the *Leaders and Managers* of

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of the City, and from their *Tools* and *Agents*, were assiduously dispatched to all *Housekeepers* in all Quarters, inviting them to assemble at *Westminster*. Or if these Men must not themselves be called Crowds, 'tis certain that, whenever they assemble upon *such Occasions* as this, Crowds follow them; and all Men who act like Mobs, are Mobs, be their Fortune what it will.

I have the Pleasure to tell your Lordship, what I know you will have Pleasure to hear, that People begin to cool apace, and to recover their Senses; that all *sober Men* detest the late Tumults; that all the *Well Affected* declare themselves ashamed of their late Conjunction with such as had far different Designs. I think I may safely add, that the Defeat of the Scheme is not likely to produce any of the great Consequences that were expected from it, and for which that Defeat was so violently laboured.

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In the Course of an Opposition so violent, it was not wonderful to observe a strange want of Candour towards the most reasonable and popular Parts of the Scheme. Instead of Commissioners of Appeal, three Judges from *Westminster-Hall*, as I have already told your Lordship, were to hear and determine Suits of Excise. Would your Lordship know the Objection made to this? It was said, "that the Judges too were appointed by the Crown." True; and so are the *Sheriffs of Counties*, who return *Juries*; nay, make *Returns of all the Members of Parliament* chosen in each County, or for it. Is not *some Power*, are not *very great Powers*, absolutely necessary to the Crown, to enable it to *execute the Laws*, and to preserve the *Ballance of our Constitution*? I do not find that the Crown aims at any *new Powers*; and 'tis necessary to *our Liberties*, that it should preserve *what it has*. Besides in these Suits about this Excise, the King could have no Interest, as having no Share in it; and the Dispute,

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when any happened, must have been between *private Subjects*, and the *Public in general*.

I have mentioned to your Lordship what Care was observed, that Informations upon Oath, in order to search private Houses, should not be lightly granted. But all that Care did not satisfy Men, who were resolved not to be satisfied. It was still *Slavery for any House* to be subject to Search upon any Information, or any Account, though it were full of *Goods* that had paid *no Duty*. What could be more unreasonable? If any the *meanest Subject* lose any of his Goods, and swear that he suspects that they are in such a House, he may, by a Warrant from a Justice of the Peace, search that House. And shall not the *Public* have an *equal Privilege*? Surely it ought; and the Officers of the *Customs* and *Excise* can do so now. Is your Lordship of Opinion, that because of this terrible Power in those Officers, to the great Infringement of the Liberty of Smuglers, the *Customs* too, ought to be suppressed?

Oh

[ 27 ]

Oh Liberty! How is thy amiable Name abused?

After all that I have said to your Lordship about this Bill, it is needless to add that I was heartily for it, and am heartily concerned that it is lost. If ever it be attempted again, I shall be for it again, though they who now opposed it should bring it in. To me it seems so reasonable and useful a Bill, that I cannot help thinking it will one time or other pass, though I doubt it will hardly be attempted soon.

When the *Freeholder*, who has so long and sorely felt the *Public Burdens*, finds himself loaded *next Year*, and *every Year* with *Two Shillings* in the Pound, instead of having the *whole taken off*, he will then remember whether he has most Obligations to *those* who proposed this *Scheme*, or to *those* who defeated it. I fancy he will find it no good Reason for such Payment, that his Neighbours, the *Grocer* and *Innkeeper*, will

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by this means have fewer Visits from the *Exciseman*; for visited by him they *both* are already. Nor would the *Poor Landholder* be a-bit easier or better satisfied, were the *genuine Reasons* for this Opposition and Up-roar, to be given him.

When the *drunken Fit* is over, People will have their Eyes clearer, and may then reflect whether they have Cause to bless the Authors of their late Intoxication. But from angry Multitudes, or angry Men, little Moderation or Candour is to be expected; and, all over the World, it is not always *Truth* that governs the *Many*. I am one of those who profess to espouse what I apprehend to be Truth, against all the Fierceness and Noise of Multitudes. Nor can *any Man* censure *Me* for following my *sincere Opinion* in voting for the *Excise*, without entitling me at the same time to censure *Him* for voting against it. To say that Men were *influenced* to be for it, may as well be said of such as were against it. I believe Men have often gone as  
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great lengths to get *Power* as others have to *keep it*; and they who rail at *Ambition in Place*, sometimes rail from *Ambition to be in Place*. Thus *Catiline* and his Associates railed at *Cicero* and other Roman Rulers.

When I mention *Cicero* and *Catiline*, your Lordship, who knows how much I hate and disapprove all false and malicious Parallels, will readily acquit me of making any; and I declare solemnly I mean none. Our Condition and Story, and that of the *Romans* then, are not alike; and it is extremely unjust to make *unjust Applications* of *Facts* and *Characters*. This would be to abuse History and the Ears of Men, and deserves as much Blame as any other Act of *Deceit* and *Injustice*. I wish such Practice were less common.

I begin to be tired with the length of my Letter; I wish it has not tired your Lordship. It is the longest that ever I sent to you or to any other Person. Perhaps I may never again have so much Cause and Mat-

ter for another; but shall be glad  
of all Occasions to testify to your  
Lordship with how much sincere Re-  
spect I am,

My LORD,

Your most obedient

And most humble Servant.



P. S. Your Lordship will probably  
be told, in the Country, what I have  
heard whispered here already; I am  
told it is even confidently reported in  
Coffee-houses, and will probably be  
soon the Burden of Journals; "That  
" the honourable Person in the Admi-  
" nistration, who proposed the Scheme,  
" was strangely dashed and terrified  
" upon presenting the Petition from  
" the City, and upon seeing the Spirit  
" which appeared to favour it in the  
" House." To all which I can truly  
answer, for I was in the House, and  
attended to his whole Behaviour, and  
I do aver to your Lordship upon my  
Honour, that I never saw any Man,  
during the whole Ferment and Contest,  
more utterly free from all Signs of Per-  
turbation and Fear. Upon the Day in  
which he was threaten'd with Insults,  
and upon the Day after he had been in-  
sulted, he spoke <sup>to</sup> <sub>g.</sub> and clearly, and  
intrepidly, with no sort of Concern, and  
with infinite Force and good Sense.  
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This is what all Men, who saw him, and heard him, if they be not notoriously prejudiced, must own; and I have heard some of his Enemies confess, that his Behaviour, upon that Occasion, was firm and good, and that he spoke with Pertinency and Spirit. — But this Truth, with many others, so inconsistent with the *Politicks* of *Party*, must not, it seems, be communicated to the People; lest it might prove a Reason with them for respecting him, when 'tis so much the Fashion to lessen, and blacken, and expose him.

From this, and many other Observations, it is exceeding plain to me, how little, how very little the People know either of those they hate or of those they love; how often they commend, where they have cause to condemn; how often they condemn, when they have reason to commend; how apt they are to mourn, when they ought to rejoice; how ready to rejoice, when they should mourn: *often* to detest Men of the highest Abilities, and often to adore such as have none.

F I N I S.