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A MODEST
PROPOSAL
 FOR THE
PROHIBITION OF SPEECH,
 Humbly Offered to the Consideration of
PARLIAMENT.



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 M D C C X L I I I.



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PROPOSAL, &c.

IT is a Truth too well known, I believe, to need any Proof that the greatest Errors have in particular Ages met with a univertal Reception. To infer therefore either a certainty or fitness of Things from a general Practice or Tradition, is in Effect to sanctify the idlest Tales and most fabulous Relations. I do not however think, that Opinions grounded on common Consent should be overthrown but by Arguments that carry the strongest Conviction along with them; but where such are produced, I hope my dear Countrymen will readily divest themselves of all unreasonable Preposseffions, and hearken to the voice of Truth, though never so opposite

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to the favourite and established Notions of the World.

So much I judged proper to premise as the Proposal I have to make may probably meet with some Opposition from People of mean contracted Views; but I here declare, I am above regarding any Adversaries, whose Hearts are actuated by little fordid Motives.

To proceed therefore to the Subject Matter, in order to which, permit me, gentle Reader, by way of Text to my following Discourse, to lay down this single Proposition, viz.

That the making articulate Sounds, (by the Vulgar called Speaking) is a most pernicious Custom, productive of innumerable Evils, and conducive in no sort to the Welfare and Happiness of Mankind, and of consequence that it ought to be utterly abolished from amongst us, by enjoining all People for the future to be absolutely dumb.

I can't indeed but acknowledge, that a very eminent Man, (Mr. Lock I mean) seems to countenance a contrary Opinion, but

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but this will only prove that the greatest Genius's are not totally exempt from Imperfection and Error. As well as I remember he expresses himself in the following Manner.

“ Language, says he, was designed as
“ the Instrument and common Tye of So-
“ ciety. Man therefore had by Nature his
“ Organs so fashioned as to be fit to frame
“ articulate Sounds, which we call Words;
“ and which Sounds it was necessary he
“ should be able to use as signs of inter-
“ nal Conceptions, and to make them
“ stand as Marks for the Ideas within
“ his own Mind, whereby they might
“ be made known to others, and the
“ Thoughts and Meanings of Men's Minds
“ be conveyed from one to another.
“ Words therefore in their primary Sig-
“ nification and Use stand for nothing
“ but the Ideas in the Mind of him that
“ uses them. When a Man speaks to
“ another it is that he may be understood,
“ and the end of Speech, is, that those
“ Sounds as Marks may make known his
“ Ideas to the Hearer.

So much for that learned Gentleman's Supposition (for so I must call it) since (I beg

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beg leave to say) there are not the least Traces. to be found amongst us, that Language produces the Effects he speaks of, and that the Thoughts and Meanings of Men's Minds are conveyed by Words from one to another.

I am very well aware of the Difficulties I lie under in encountring a Custom grown venerable and sanctified as it were by a long Course of Time. That Mankind have been a great while accustomed to speaking is most certainly true, but that they ought for that Reason to persevere in a bad Practice is by no means a just Consequence. If being once in an Error is a good Argument for continuing in it, all Reformations are wrong, and instead of a Protestant Church, Popery or Paganism ought to be established amongst us.

The pretended use of Speech, is, that the Thoughts and Meanings of Men's Minds may by their Words be conveyed from one to another! I ask, how this End has been answered? And whether Language is not rather the common Instrument of all manner of Deceit and Circumvention? What Arguments then can be brought in Defence of a Practice
attended

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attended with the most fatal Mischiefs? I never heard of but one that seemed to carry any sort of Plausibility along with it, and that I shall consider with the Temper becoming an impartial Enquirer after Truth.

An ingenious Physician who has wrote a Dissertation on the Excellence of Exercise for the Preservation of Health, attempts to shew the Power of the Exercise of the Voice on the principal Organs of the Body, and observes that frequent speaking is so proper to supply other bodily Exercises, that perhaps it would not be a meer Jest to say, that if Women don't want so much Exercise as Men, 'tis because they are more Talkative.

I am willing to give this Argument its full Weight, and supposing what is here taken for granted, viz. That Talking is a wholesome Exercise. I will go a little further, and allow, that the Health as well of ourselves as our Fellow-creatures, is, or ought to be a principal Consideration in all human Resolutions and Determinations, but after these Concessions, how will it follow that we are in any sort necessitated to
tolerate

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tollerate the Exercise of Talking, unless the Health of Mankind can by no other means be properly supported, which I believe the most sanguine Advocates for Prating will not have Boldness enough to pretend. Have we not a thousand innocent salubrious Exercises amongst us? and why must we then have Recourse to any liable to the minutest Objection? especially to one that is noxious in so many Particulars; for though I have here supposed that Talking is a wholesome Exercise, I think the contrary may be very easily demonstrated.

'Tis certain that Women do not want so much Exercise as Men, but that is not owing to their being more talkative, but to their great Temperance and Moderation in Eating and Drinking, and I appeal to all the married Men of *Great Britain*, whether their Wives are ever more indisposed, or in a worse Condition both of Body and Mind, than when they talk most. I have known a Fit of Talking immediately inflame the whole mass of Blood of the most eminent Beauty in this Town, inso-much that for many Days together she was not able to shew her Face. And we all know in Fevers, the Symptom which de-
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notes the extreamest Danger, is, that of Raving or Talking much, for which Reason the most skilful Physicians always direct the Patient to be kept as quiet as possible. The *British* Ladies were never so remarkable for robust Constitutions as in the Reign of the glorious Queen *Elizabeth*, and yet the Maxim in those Days was, that they shou'd be seen, but not heard. In short, there is something so baneful and malignant in the very Nature of Speech, that a single Word has been often known to throw a whole Family into a raging Disorder, and *Solomon* gives talking no other Encomium, than that of a Fool's being known by a multitude of Words. It is likewise recorded of one of the most learned of antient Philosophers, that he taught his Pupils to be dumb for seven Years, and if to be dumb seven Years was a good Thing, surely to be always dumb is much better.

I shall now Consider some of the Conveniencies that would naturally accrue to the Publick, from the abolishing of Speech, or in other Words, from People's ceasing to Talk.

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In the first Place then, I submit it, whether it would not be a probable means of uniting that numerous and wealthy Sect of People called *Quakers* to the established Church of *England*. Our free and volatile way of Speaking (which is quite inconsistent with the prudent and emphatical manner that prevails amongst them) we all know to be one of their principal Objections against us. They are frugal of their Speech, and therein do they exceed us in Wisdom. A Church of England-man utters ten times as many Words in a Minute as a *Quaker*, and there is therefore ten times the Chance against him, of his saying more foolish Things, but by totally abolishing the Practice of talking, this Objection to us must necessarily fall to the Ground. We shall neither be in danger of saying foolish Things, nor of giving Offence to wise Men who are obliged to hear us, and by making this Step to a Coalition, who knows but they may come the rest of the Way, which would certainly be a great strengthening to the Protestant Interest.

It is likewise worthy of Consideration how many fine Gentlemen's Lives would be annually saved, by putting it out of their Power to give each other the Lie, which
nothing

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nothing but being dumb can ever effectually prevent.

The Tongue is the Conduit of Defamation, the poisoned Pipe through which the malicious convey their devouring Scandal! Let it therefore be closed up with an eternal Silence, that that Fury, Detraction may no longer usurp an Empire over us. What! though our Tea-tables suffer in their Merriment? Surely, the Ladies of *Great Britain* (who are of a lively ingenious Nature) can't long be at a Loss for some Entertainment more honourable, pleasing, and innocent, than that of abusing their Neighbours and best Friends. What a Comfort will it likewise be to every sober Man to be able to walk through all Parts of this great City, not excepting even the Hundreds of *Drury*, or the Parade at *Whitehall*, and never to have his Ears annoyed with any of those shocking Oaths or Curses, that now make up so considerable a Part of even the politest Conversations.

And to this Advantage may be added, that of avoiding the unfavoury Morning Salutes of drunken Sots, and rotten Men of Gallantry, who by throwing an infectious Breath

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in your Face, are always sure to deprive you of that Health, which their ill-timed good Breeding makes them enquire after.

A Law for cutting out the Tongues of all Stock-jobbers, has been often mentioned as a most equitable and rational Expedient to free the Nation from the Evils attending their Practices; and indeed I believe it can't be denied, that nothing but the destroying the means of propagating false Rumours can ever effectually secure us from the execrable Devices of that set of Men. However since a general Prohibition of Speech cannot fail of answering all the same good Purposes, and of obviating all the Mischiefs complained of, and as it has ever been a Maxim amongst the wisest Legislatures to have the Prevention of Crimes in their Contemplation, rather than the Punishment; I apprehend the easiest Method (which is doubtless the most agreeable to Nature) ought without any sort of Hesitation to be preferred by us.

The number of innocent young Creatures daily seduced into Infamy and Ruin by the smooth beguiling Tongues of perjured Debauchees, is an Evil that (to the great Consolation of all who have Daughters to dispose

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pose of) we should likewise be sure of seeing immediately remedied by a Prohibition of Speech.

Many Schemes have from time to time been recommended to the Publick for the discharging the heavy Debt under which the Nation at present groans, but I beg leave to say, that a Law to make People dumb would prove the most adequate to that noble Design, of any Method that has yet been hit upon. We all know, or at least have heard of the immense Sums daily expended by great M——s to pay People for holding their Tongues, infomuch that it is become a kind of M———l Proverb, when any Person talks louder than ordinary, to say, that that Man wants to have his Mouth stopp'd; but by passing an Act for a general Silence, all this Money would be saved to the Exchequer, which in a few Years would go a great way in lightening the national Debt, and getting rid at least of such Taxes as bear hardest on the Staple Commodities of the Kingdom.

How glorious would it be! To see Princes no longer exposed to the Blandishments of Flatterers, nor subject to the envious Whispers of insidious Parasides! Oh! For that

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that happy Hour! But alas! That happy Hour we can have no hopes of seeing, till all Mankind are dumb.

It would most certainly save a vast deal of Time and Trouble, to have every thing acted in Silence, and whether this Method (had it been instituted some time agoe) would not have done Honour to the greatest part, as well of our foreign as domestick Transactions, during a certain M——y, the Gentlemen who have had the Management of them, will be pleased, I hope, to take into their most serious Consideration.

What a happy tranquil Life would that of a Prime M——'s be, provided he was not liable to the saucy Jests and Sarcasms of unruly little People! Now-a-days there is no going any where but what you are immediately surrounded by a Tribe of impertinent Coxcombs, who are making free with their Betters, and turning the grave Measures of our greatest S——n into Ridicule and Contempt. Such Insults are intolerable, and ought not be offered to illustrious C——rs; but that no worthy Men hereafter may be discouraged by the malicious Tongues of scurvy Fellows out of
P——e,

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P——e, I conceive some Expedient ought to be thought of, and I do not apprehend a more pregnant and effectual one can possibly be devised, than an absolute Prohibition of Speech.

Many and great are the Advantages besides those already mentioned, that would necessarily redound to Society from the Taciturnity of Mankind; to enumerate them all, would take up more Time, and fill more Paper, than I at present can well spare, the Reader's own Observation will save me that Labour and Expence. I shall therefore add but one more, which I conceive in itself to be sufficient to obviate every possible Objection against the Regulation herein proposed. I say then, that if Speaking was totally laid aside, we should no longer have Recourse to the Words, but to the Actions of Mankind, to know how far any Person might with safety be depended on. *Punchinello il Patriota Furioso* is a recent Example how little Confidence we should put in the Expressions of others; for twice ten rolling Years that Tongue of his belied his Heart in every Word it spoke, and therefore as the Actions of Men are the only true Criterion to distinguish them by, I shall, upon the whole, most humbly submit it to the
Wisdom

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Wisdom of the Legislature, whether the Evils attending the abominable Practice of Talking, that has so long prevailed amongst us, do not loudly cry out for Redress? and whether it be not expedient to pass a Law either totally to abolish all manner of Intercourse by articulate Sounds, or else to make it High Treason for any Person whatsoever to believe what another says to him; but as the latter may be subject to Cavils, I think the first Method the most eligible, the Advantages being apparent, and it being liable to no manner of Objection that can surely have the least Weight with a reasonable Person.

The END.