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ESSAY XI.

Of the PARTIES of GREAT-BRITAIN. ↩

WERE the *British* Government proposed as a Subject of Speculation to a studious Man, he wou'd immediately perceive in it a Source of Division and Party, which it wou'd be almost impossible for it, in any Administration, to avoid. The just Ballance betwixt the Republican and Monarchical Part of our Constitution is really, in itself, so extreme delicate and uncertain, that when join'd to Men's Passions and Prejudices, 'tis impossible but different Opinions must arise concerning it, even among Persons of the best Understanding. Those of mild Tempers, who love Peace and Order, and detest Sedition and Civil Wars, will always entertain more favourable Sentiments [120] of Monarchy, than Men of bold Spirits, who are passionate Lovers of Liberty, and think no Evil comparable to Subjection and Slavery. And though all reasonable Men agree in general to preserve our mixt Government; yet when they come to Particulars, some will incline to trust larger Powers to the Crown, to bestow on it more Influence, and to guard against its Encroachments with less Caution, than others who are terrified at the most distant Approaches of Tyranny and despotic Power. Thus there are Parties of PRINCIPLE involved in the very Nature of our Constitution, which may properly enough be denominated [11] COURT and COUNTRY Parties. The [121] Strength and Violence of each of these Parties will much depend upon the particular Administration. An Administration may be so bad as to throw a great Majority into the Country Party; as a good Administration will reconcile to the Court many of the most passionate Lovers of Liberty. But, however the Nation may fluctuate betwixt these two Parties, the Parties will always subsist, as long as we are govern'd by a limited Monarchy.

BUT, besides this Difference of *Principle*, those Parties are very much fomented by a Difference of INTEREST, without which they cou'd scarce ever be dangerous or violent. The Crown will naturally bestow all its Trust and Power upon those, whose Principles, real or pretended, are most favourable to Monarchical Government; and this Temptation will naturally engage them to go greater Lengths than their Principles wou'd otherwise carry them. Their Antagonists, who are disappointed in their ambitious Aims, throw themselves into the Party, whose Principles incline them to be most jealous of Royal Power, and naturally carry those Principles to a greater Length than sound Politics will justify. Thus, the [122] *Court* and *Country* Parties, which are the genuine Factions of the *British* Government, are a kind of mixt Parties, and are influenced partly by Principle, partly by Interest. The Heads of the Parties are commonly most governed by the latter Motive; the inferior Members of them, by the former. I must be understood to mean this of Persons who have any Motive for taking Party on any Side. For, to tell the Truth, the greatest Part are commonly Men who associate themselves they know not why; from Example, from Passion, from Idleness. But still it is requisite there be some Source of Division, either in Principle or Interest; otherwise such Persons wou'd not find Parties, to which they cou'd associate themselves.

AS to Ecclesiastical Parties; we may observe, that, in all Ages of the World, Priests have been Enemies to Liberty; and 'tis certain, that this steady Conduct of theirs must have been founded on fixt Reasons of Interest and Ambition. Liberty of thinking, and of expressing our Thoughts, is always fatal to Priestly Power, and to those pious Frauds, on which it is commonly founded; and by [123] an infallible Connexion, which is found among every Species of Liberty, this Privilege can never be enjoy'd, at least, has never yet been enjoy'd, but in a free Government. Hence it must happen, in such a Government as *Britain*, that the establish'd Clergy will always be of the *Court*-Party; as, on the contrary, Dissenters of all

former, without Reserve, into the King's Party; and the latter into that of the Parliament. The *Cavaliers* being the Court-Party, and the *Round-heads* the Country-Party, the Union was infallible betwixt the former and the establish'd Prelacy, and betwixt the latter and Presbyterian Non-conformists. This Union is so natural, according to the general Principles of Politics, that it requires some very extraordinary Concurrence of Circumstances to break it.

EVERY one knows the Event of this Quarrel; fatal to the King first, and to the Parliament afterwards. After many Confusions and Revolutions, the Royal Family was at last restor'd, and the Government establish'd on the same Footing as before. *Charles II.* was not made wiser by the dreadful Example of his Father; but prosecuted the same Measures, tho' with more Secrecy and Caution. New Parties arose, under the Appellations [...] WHIG and TORY, which have continued ever since to confound and distract our Government. [128] What the Nature is of these Parties, is, perhaps, one of the most difficult Questions that can be met with, and is a Proof, that History may contain Problems, as uncertain as any that are to be found in the most abstract Sciences. We have seen the Conduct of these two Parties, during the Course of Seventy Years, in a vast Variety of Circumstances, possess'd of Power, and depriv'd of it, during Peace and during War: We meet with Persons, who profess themselves of one Side or t'other, every Hour, in Company, in our Pleasures, in our serious Occupations: We ourselves are constrain'd, in a Manner, to take Party; and living in a Country of the highest Liberty, every one may openly declare all his Sentiments and Opinions: And yet we are at a Loss to tell the Nature, Pretensions, and Principles of the two Parties. The Question is, perhaps, in itself, somewhat difficult; but has been render'd more so, by the Prejudices and Violence of Party.

WHEN we compare the Parties of *Whig* and *Tory*, to those of *Round-head* and *Cavalier*, the most obvious Difference, that appears betwixt them, consists in the Doctrines [129] of *passive Obedience* and *indefeasible Right*, which were but little heard of among the *Cavaliers*, but became the universal Doctrine, and was the true Characteristic, of a *Tory*. Were these Principles push'd into their most obvious Consequences, they imply a formal Renunciation of all our Liberties, and an Avowal of absolute Monarchy; since nothing can be a greater Absurdity than a limited Power, which must not be resisted, even when it exceeds its Limitations. But as the most rational Principles are often but a weak Counterpoise to Passion; 'tis no Wonder, that these absurd Principles, *sufficient*, according to a justly celebrated [12] Author, *to shock the common Sense of a HOTTENTOT or SAMOIEDE*, were found too weak for that Effect. The *Tories*, as Men, were Enemies to Oppression; and also, as *Englishmen*, they were Enemies to despotick Power. Their Zeal for Liberty, was, perhaps, less fervent than that of their Antagonists; but was sufficient to make them forget all their general Principles, when they saw themselves openly threaten'd with a Subversion of the antient Government. [130] From these Sentiments arose the *Revolution*; an Event of mighty Consequence, and the firmest Foundation of *British Liberty*. The Conduct of the *Tories*, during that Event, and after it, will afford us a true Insight into the Nature of that Party.

IN the *first* Place, They appear to have had the Sentiments of true *Britons* in their Affection to Liberty, and their determin'd Resolution not to sacrifice it to any abstract Principles whatsoever, or to any imaginary Rights of Princes. This Part of their Character might justly have been doubted of before the *Revolution*, from the obvious Tendency of their avow'd Principles, and from their almost unbounded Compliances with a Court, that made little Secret of its arbitrary Designs. The *Revolution* show'd them to have been, in this Respect, nothing but a genuine *Court-Party*, such as might be expected in a *British* Government: That is, *Lovers of Liberty, but greater Lovers of Monarchy*. It must, however, be confest, that they carry'd their monarchical Principles further, even in Practice, [131] but more so in Theory, than was, in any Degree, consistent with a limited Government.

England, and the Covenanters in *Scotland*. As Enthusiasm is founded on strong Spirits, and a presumptuous Boldness of Character, it naturally begets the most extreme Resolutions; especially after it rises to that Height as to inspire the deluded Fanatics with the Opinion of Divine Illuminations, and with a Contempt of the common Rules of Reason, Morality and Prudence.

[145]

'TIS thus Enthusiasm produces the most cruel Desolation in human Society: But its Fury is like that of Thunder and Tempest, which exhaust themselves in a little Time, and leave the Air more calm and serene than before. The Reason of this will appear evidently by comparing Enthusiasm to Superstition, the other Species of false Religion; and tracing the natural Consequences of each. As Superstition is founded on Fear, Sorrow, and a Depression of Spirits, it represents the Person to himself in such despicable Colours, that he appears unworthy in his own Eyes of approaching the Divine Presence, and naturally has Recourse to any other Person, whose Sanctity of Life, or, perhaps, Impudence and Cunning, have made him be supposed to be more favoured by the Divinity. To him they entrust their Devotions: To his Care they recommend their Prayers, Petitions, and Sacrifices: And by his Means hope to render their Addresses acceptable to their incensed Deity. Hence the Origin of [13] PRIESTS, who may justly be regarded [146] as proceeding from one of the grossest Inventions of a timorous and abject Superstition, which, ever diffident of itself, dares not offer up its own Devotions, but ignorantly thinks to recommend itself to the Divinity by the Mediation of his supposed Friends and Servants. As Superstition is a considerable Ingredient of almost all Religions, even the most fanatical; there being nothing but Philosophy able to conquer entirely these unaccountable Terrors; hence it proceeds, that in almost every Sect of Religion there are Priests to be found: But the stronger Mixture there is of Superstition, the higher is the Authority of the Priesthood. Modern Judaism and Popery, especially the latter, being the most barbarous and absurd Superstitions, that have yet been known in the World, are the most enslav'd by their Priests. As the Church of *England* has a strong Mixture of Popish Superstition, it partakes also, in its original Constitution, of a Propensity to Priestly Power and Dominion; particularly in [147] the Respect it exacts to the Priest. And tho', according to the Sentiments of that Church, the Prayers of the Priest must be accompanied with those of the Laity; yet is he the Mouth of the Congregation, his Person is sacred, and without his Presence few would think their public Devotions, or the Sacraments and other Rites, acceptable to the Divinity.

ON the other hand, it may be observed, that all Enthusiasts have been free from the Yoke of Ecclesiastics, and have express a great Independence in their Devotion; with a Contempt of Forms, Traditions and Authorities. The *Quakers* are the most egregious, tho' at the same Time the most innocent, Enthusiasts that have been yet known; and are, perhaps, the only Sect, that have never admitted Priests amongst them: The *Independents*, of all the *English* Sectaries, approach nearest to the *Quakers* in Fanaticism, and in their Freedom from Priestly Bondage. The *Presbyterians* follow after, at an equal Distance in both these Particulars. In short, this Observation is founded on the most certain Experience; and will also appear to be founded on Reason, if we consider that as Enthusiasm arises from a presumptuous [148] Pride and Confidence, it thinks itself sufficiently qualified to *approach* the Divinity, without any human Mediator. Its rapturous Devotions are so servent, that it even imagines itself *actually* to *approach* him, by the Way of Contemplation and inward Converse; which makes it neglect all those outward Ceremonies and Observances, to which the Assistance of the Priest appears so requisite in the Eyes of their superstitious Votaries. The Fanatic consecrates himself, and bestows on his own Person a sacred Character, much superior to what Forms and Ceremonious Instititions can confer on any other.

Endnotes

- [1] *Mons. Fontenelle, Pluralité des Mondes, Soir 6.*
- [2] For Forms of Government let Fools contest: Whate'er is best administer'd is best. *Essay on Man, Book 3.*
- [3] "Essempio veramenti raro, & da Filosofi intante loro imaginate & vedute Republiche mai non trovato, vedere dentro ad un medesimo cerchio, fra medesimcittadini, la liberta, & la tirannide, la vita civile & la cororta, la giustitia & la licenza; perche quello ordine & solo mantione quella citta piera di costumi antichi & venerabili. E s'egli anvenisse (che col tempo in ogni modo anverrà) que San Giorgio tutta quella città occupasse, sarrebbe quella una Republica pin que la Venetiana memorabile." *Della Hist. Fiorentina, Lib. 8.*
- [4] *Dissertation on Parties, Letter 10.*
- [5] *Miscellaneous Reflections, Page 107.*
- [6] See *Dissertation on Parties*, throughout.
- [7] By that Influence of the Crown, which I would justify, I mean only, that arising from the Offices and Honours, that are at the Disposal of the Crown. As to *Bribery*, it may be considered in the same Light as the Practice of employing Spies, which is scarce justifiable in good Minister, and infamous in a bad one: But to be a Spy, or to be corrupted, is always infamous in all Ministries, and is to be regarded as a shameless Prostitution.
- [8] About 400,000 l. Sterling.
- [9] On ne monte jamais si haut que quand on ne sqait pas ou on va, said Cromwell to the President de Bellievre.
- [10] Lewis XIIth.
- [11] These Words have become of general Use, and therefore I shall employ them, without intending to express by them an universal Blame of the one Party, or Approbation of the other. The Court-Party may, no doubt, on some Occasions, consult best the Interest of the Country, and the Country-Party oppose it. In like Manner, the *Roman* Parties were denominated *Optimates* and *Populares*; and *Cicero*, like a true Party. man, defines the *Optimates* to be such as, in all their publick Conduct, regulated themselves by the Sentiments of the best and worthiest of the *Romans* : *Pro Sextio*. The Term of *Country-Party* may afford a favourable Definition or Etymology of the same kind: But it would be Folly to draw any Argument from that Head, and I have no Regard to it in employing these Terms.
- [12] *Dissertation on Parties, Letter 2d.*
- [13] By Priests, I understand only the Pretenders to Power and Dominion, and to a superior Sanctity of Character, distinct from Virtue and good Morals. These are very different from *Clergymen*, who are set apart to the Care of sacred Matters, and the Conducting our public Devotions with greater Decency and Order. There is no Rank of Men more to be respected than the latter.
- [14] Mr. Addison, and my Lord Shaftsbury.
- [15] Doctor Swift.

