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A HISTORY

OF

ENGLAND,

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS

FROM

A NOBLEMAN TO HIS SON.

WRITTEN BY

LORD LYTTTELTON AND D^r GOLDSMITH.

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A CONTINUATION TILL THE PRESENT TIME.


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LETTER XLVII.

As we descend, we find the materials for English history increase: the minutest transactions are recorded with prolixity; and these, however dry and unimproving to some, are yet both interesting and satisfactory to others. In such a profusion of materials I must be content rather to give the spirit of the following reigns, than pretend to exhibit a historical detail of particular interests and intrigues. It will be enough to mark those strong outlines that may probably escape the wreck of time, when the internal colouring shall fade. As history increases in time by the addition of new events, an epitome becomes more necessary to abridge its excrescences.

The duke of York, who succeeded his brother with the title of king James the second, *A. D.* 1685. had been bred a papist, and was strongly bigotted to his principles. It is the pro-

perty of that religion, almost ever, to contract the sphere of the understanding; and, until people are in some measure disengaged from its prejudices, it is impossible to lay just claim to extensive views or consistency of design. The intellects of this prince were naturally weak, and his bigotted principles still rendered them more feeble: he conceived the ridiculous project of reigning in the arbitrary manner of his predecessor, and changing the established religion of his country, at a time when his person was hated, and the established religion was universally approved.

The people of England were now entirely changed from what they had been in the times of Henry, Mary, and Elisabeth, who had altered religion at will. Learning was now as much cultivated by the laity as by the priesthood; every man now pretended to think himself, and had rational grounds for his opinion. In the beginning of the reformation the monarchs had only to bring over the clergy, in order totally to change the modes of belief; for the people were entirely guided by their pastors. To influence the priesthood was an easy task: the hopes of preferment, or the fears of degradation, entirely subjected the consciences of the clergy to the royal will. Such it was then: but the circumstances of the nation were, at present, entirely altered; and to make a change in religion, it would have been necessary to tamper with every individual in the state. But James had no idea of the alteration of circumstances; his situation, he thought, supplied him with authority, and his zeal furnished him with hope of accomplishing this chimerical design.

The success he met with in crushing a rebellion, in the opening of his reign, seemed to promise a favourable omen toward the completion of his wishes. The duke of Monmouth, who had long

been at the head of faction, and inflamed all the discontents that molested the late king's reign, was now resolved to aim at the crown. He was the darling of the people; and some averred that the king had married his mother, and owned his legitimacy at his death. The earl of Argyll seconded his views, and they formed a scheme of a double insurrection. Argyll first landed in Scotland, published his manifestoes, put himself at the head of two thousand five hundred *A. D.* 1685. men, and attempted to influence the nation; but a formidable body of the king's forces coming against him, his army fell away, and he himself, after being wounded in attempting to escape, was taken by a peasant, standing up to his neck in water. Being brought to Edinburgh, he prepared for his death, well knowing that it was not in the king's nature to forgive an enemy.

The duke of Monmouth was not more fortunate; he sailed from the Texel with three vessels, and arrived on the coast of Dorsetshire with about fourscore followers. The country soon flocked in to his standard, and in two days his army was increased to two thousand men. The earl of Feversham was sent to oppose him, and took post at Sedgemore, a village in Somersetshire. Monmouth resolved to fight him, and began his march about eleven in the night, with profound silence; but the royalists were prepared for his reception: the action began at daybreak. Lord Grey, who commanded the duke of Monmouth's horse, was routed at the first onset. The duke at the head of his infantry bravely maintained his ground, until he was charged in flank by the enemy's horse, who had been just now victorious. A total rout ensued; three hundred were killed in the engagement, and a thousand in pursuit. The duke escaped the carnage, and, in a shepherd's

disguise, fled on foot, attended by a faithful companion, who had followed his fortunes into England. Thus they travelled on toward Dorsetshire, till, quite exhausted with hunger and fatigue, they lay down in a field, and covered themselves with stubble. In this forlorn situation he was found, with some pease in his pocket, which he had gathered in the fields to sustain life. His spirit sunk with his misfortunes; he wrote to the king; implored his mercy. The king gave him an audience, as if willing to satisfy his vengeance with the sight of a rival's misery; but his death was determined, and no entreaties could extort royal clemency. On the scaffold he resumed his former courage, handled the axe, declared that he meant well to the nation, and his head was cut off, but not till after the third blow.

But it were happy for the nation, and fortunate for the king, if the blood that was already shed had been thought a sufficient expiation for the late offence. The victorious army behaved with the most savage cruelty to the prisoners taken after the battle. Their inhumanity was properly seconded by Jefferies, who was sent on the Western circuit to try the insurgents. His furious thirst of blood being inflamed by continual intoxication, he threatened, calumniated, and threw aside every appearance of clemency. Men and women indiscriminately felt the effects of his savage zeal; and not less than two hundred and fifty persons expired under circumstances of wanton cruelty. Cruel kings ever find cruel ministers.

It was not to be expected, that these butcheries could acquire the king the love or the confidence of his people, or tend to alter their opinions, as they rather excited the secret abhorrence of every honest man; yet he thought this a time favourable for the carrying on his scheme of religion and arbi-

trary government. An attempt at arbitrary power in Charles was, in some measure, excusable, as he had a republican faction to oppose; and it might have been prudent at that time to overstep justice, in order to attain security: but the same designs in James were as unnecessary as impracticable; since there were few republicans remaining, and the people were satisfied with limited monarchy. But this weak and deluded monarch was resolved to imitate one or two princes of Europe, who had just before rendered themselves absolute; and he was incited to this project by Lewis XIV. who secretly desired his destruction. Thus instigated, he began his designs with the measures which he should not have used till their completion. He sent a splendid embassy to Rome, to acknowledge his obedience to the pope. Innocent, who then filled the chair, was too good a politician to approve of such childish measures, and gave his ambassador a very cool reception. He was sensible that the king was openly striking at those laws and opinions which it was his business to undermine in silence and security. The cardinals were even heard facetiously to declare, *that the king should be excommunicated for thus endeavouring to overturn the small remains of popery that still subsisted in England.*

James, notwithstanding these discouragements, was yet resolved to prosecute his favourite scheme with vigour. Upon every occasion the catholics shared his confidence and favour. Hugh Peters, his confessor, ruled his conscience, and drove him blindly forward to attempt innovation. He became every day more and more ambitious of making converts; the earl of Sunderland sacrificed his religion to his ambition; the earl of Rochester lost his employment of treasurer, for refusing to alter his religion. The king stooped so low as to his

officers: a rough soldier one day answered his remonstrances by saying he was preengaged, for he had promised the king of Morocco, when he was quartered at Tangiers, that, should he ever change his religion, he would turn Mahometan.

An ecclesiastical court was erected with power *A. D.* 1686. to punish all delinquents, or such so reputed by the court, with all manner of ecclesiastical censures. The vice-chancellor of Cambridge was summoned before this court for having refused to admit one Francis, a Benedictine monk, to the degree of master of arts: the vice-chancellor was deprived of his office; but the university persisted in their refusal, and the king thought proper to desist from his purpose. The vice-president and fellows of Magdalen college in Oxford were treated with more severity. They refused to admit one Farmer, a new convert, and one of a profligate life, who was nominated by the king to the place of president, now become vacant. The king next nominated Parker, bishop of Oxford; but he was equally obnoxious for the same reasons. The king repaired in person to Oxford: he reproached the fellows with insolence and disobedience; but neither he, nor his ministers, could prevail to alter the resolutions of this society. The fellows were expelled by his order, and their places filled with papists, who he knew would be more obedient to his commands.

His designs hitherto were sufficiently manifest; but he was now resolved entirely to throw off the mask. By his permission the pope's nuncio made his public entry into Windsor in his pontificals, preceded by the cross, and attended by a great number of monks, in the habit of their respective orders. He next published a declaration for liberty of conscience, by which all restraints upon popery were taken away. The church of

England took the alarm. The peculiar animosity of the people against the catholic religion proceeded not less from religious than temporal motives. It is the spirit of that religion to favour arbitrary power, and its reproach to encourage persecution. The English had too often smarted under both, to be willing again to submit to either. Seven bishops, who had received the king's express orders to cause this declaration of liberty of conscience to be read in their churches, refused to comply. They drew up a modest petition, to excuse their refusal, which only served to increase the king's resentment and rage. They *A. D.* 1687. were cited before the council, and still adhered to their former resolution with that firmness which is the characteristic of virtue. The attorney-general was ordered to prosecute them for publishing sedition, and abridging the king's prerogative. They were committed prisoners to the Tower, conducted thither amid the prayers and condolence of an incredible multitude of the populace, who regarded them as sufferers for truth. The day appointed for their trial arrived. The cause was looked upon as the crisis of English freedom. The council managed the debate on both sides with learning and candour: the jury withdrew into a chamber, where they passed the whole night, but next morning returned into court, and declared the bishops not guilty. The joy of the people, on this occasion, was inexpressible: the whole city, and the country around, seemed at once to catch the shouts of exultation; they even reached the camp, where the king was then sitting at dinner, who heard them with indignation and amazement.

If the bishops testified the readiness of martyrs in support of their religion, James showed no less obstinacy in his attempts toward the establishment

of his own. Finding the clergy adverse to his designs, he next tried what he could do with the army. He thought, if one regiment would promise implicit obedience, their example would soon induce others to the same compliance. He ordered one of the regiments to be drawn up in his presence, and desired that such as were against his late declaration of liberty should lay down their arms. He was surprised to see the whole battalion ground their arms, except two officers and a few Roman catholic soldiers.

Opposition only served to increase the infatuated monarch's zeal; he was continually stimulated by his queen and his priests to proceed rashly onward. But he was particularly urged on by the jesuit Peters, his confessor, an ambitious and intriguing priest, whom some historians have even accused of being the creature of the prince of Orange, the king's son in-law, who had long since conceived hopes of seizing the crown. James now, therefore, issued orders for prosecuting all those clergymen who had forborne to read his declaration. He placed one Gifford, a doctor of the Sorbonne, at the head of Magdalen college, and likewise nominated him to the see of Oxford, lately become vacant. Every member of the church of England now saw their danger; and whigs and tories united their efforts to oppose it.

William, prince of Orange, had married Mary the daughter of king James. This prince had been early immersed in danger, calamities, and politics; the designs of France, and the turbulence of Holland, had served to sharpen his talents, and given him a propensity for intrigue. This great politician and soldier concealed, beneath a phlegmatic appearance, a most violent and boundless ambition; all his actions were levelled at power, while his discourse never betrayed the

wishes of his heart. His temper was cold and severe, his genius active and piercing; he was valiant without ostentation, and politic without address; disdaining the pleasures, or the elegancies of life, yet eager after the phantom of preeminence. He was no stranger to the murmurs of the English, and was resolved to turn them to his interest: he therefore accepted the invitations of the nobility and others, and still more willingly embarked in the cause, as he found the malecontents had concerted their measures with prudence and secrecy.

A fleet was equipped sufficient to transport fifteen thousand troops; and it was at first given out that this armanent was designed against France. James, at length, began to see his own errors and the discontents of the people: he would now have retracted his measures in favour of popery, but it was too late; the fleet of the prince was already sailed, and had landed thirteen thousand troops at the village of Broxholme, in Torbay.

The expectations of the prince of Orange seemed, at first, to be frustrated; very few Englishmen offered him their services, though the people were, in general, well affected to his design. Slight repulses were not sufficient to intimidate a general who had, from early youth, encountered adversity: he continued ten days in expectation of being joined by the malecontents without success; but just when he began to deliberate about reimbarcking his forces, he was joined by several persons of consequence, and the country people came flocking to his standard. From this day his numbers began to increase; the nobility, which had composed the court and council of king James, now left their old master to solicit protection from the new.

Lewis XIV. had long foreseen this defection,

and had formerly offered the king thirty thousand men for his security. This was then refused by James, by the advice of Sunderland, his favourite, who was secretly in the interest of the prince of Orange. James, however, now requested assistance from France, when it was too late. He wrote in vain to Leopold, emperor of Germany, who only returned for answer, that what he had foreseen had happened. He had some dependence on his fleet, but they were entirely disaffected. In a word, his interests were deserted by all; for he had long deserted them himself. He was at the head of an army of twenty thousand men, and it is possible, that, had he led them to the combat without granting them time for deliberation, they might have fought in his favour: but he was involved in a maze of fears and suspicions; the defection of those he most confided in took away his power of deliberation, and his perplexity was increased, when told that the prince of Denmark and Anne, his favourite daughter, had gone over to the prince of Orange. In this exigence he could not repress his tears, and in the agony of his heart was heard to exclaim, *God help me, my own children have forsaken me!*

He now hung over the precipice of destruction; invaded by one son-in-law, abandoned by another, hated by his subjects, and detested by those who had suffered beneath his cruelty. He assembled the few noblemen who still adhered to his interests, and demanded their advice and assistance. Addressing himself to the earl of Bedford, father to lord Russel, who was beheaded by James's intrigues in the preceding reign, *My lord*, said he, *you are an honest man, have great credit, and can do me signal service.*—*Ah, Sir*, replied the earl, *I am old and feeble, I can do you but little service; but I once had a son that could have*

assisted you, but he is no more. James was so struck with this reply, that he could not speak for some minutes.

The king was naturally timid; and some counsellors about him, either sharing his fears, or bribed by the prince, contributed to increase his apprehensions. They reminded him of the fate of Charles I. and aggravated the turbulence of the people. He was, at length, persuaded to think of flying from a nation he could no longer govern, and of taking refuge at the court of France, where he was sure of finding assistance and protection. Thus instructed, he first sent away his queen, who arrived safely at Calais; and soon after, disguising himself in a plain dress, he went down to Feversham, and embarked on board a small vessel for France. But his misfortunes still continued to follow him; the vessel was detained by the common people, who, not knowing their sovereign, robbed, insulted, and abused him. He was now persuaded by the earl of Winchelsea to return to London, where he was once more received amid the acclamations of the people.

The return of James was by no means agreeable to William, though he well knew how to dissemble. It was his interest and his design to increase the forsaken monarch's apprehensions, so as to induce him to fly. He therefore received the news of his return with a haughty air, and ordered him to leave Whitehall, and to retire to Richmond. The king remonstrated against Richmond, and desired that Rochester might be appointed as the place of his abode. The prince perceived his intention was to leave the kingdom; nor did the one wish for flight more ardently than the other desired him away. The king soon concurred with his designs: after staying but a

short time at Rochester, he fled to the seaside, attended by his natural son the duke of Berwick, where he embarked for France, and arrived in safety, to enjoy, for the rest of life, the empty title of a king, and the appellation of a saint, a title which still flattered him more. There he continued to reside among a people who pitied, ridiculed, and despised him. He enrolled himself in the order of Jesuits; and the court of Rome, for whom he had lost all, repaid him only with indulgences and pasquinades.

From this moment the constitution of England, that had fluctuated for so many ages, was fixed. The nation, represented by its parliament, determined the long contested limits between the king and the people: they prescribed to the prince of Orange the terms by which he was to rule; they chose him for king, jointly with Mary, who was the next protestant heir to the crown. They were crowned by the titles of William III. and Mary, king and queen of England. The prince saw his ambition at length gratified; and his wisdom was repaid with that crown which the folly of his predecessor had given away.

LETTER XLVIII.

THOUGH William was chosen king of England, his power was limited on every side; and the opposition he met with from his parliaments still lessened his authority. His sway in Holland, where he was but the stadtholder, was far more arbitrary; so that he might, with greater propriety, have been called the king of the United Provinces, and the stadtholder of England. He was not sufficiently acquainted with the difficulty of governing the nation by which he was elected:

he expected in them a people ready to second the views of his ambition in humbling France; but he found them more apt to fear for the invasion of their domestic liberties from himself.

His reign commenced, however, with the same attempt which had been the principal cause of all the disturbances in the preceding reign, and had excluded the monarch from the throne. William was a calvinist, and naturally averse to persecution. He therefore began by attempting to repeal those laws that enjoined uniformity of worship; and though he could not entirely succeed in his design, yet a toleration was granted to such dissenters as should take the oaths of allegiance, and hold no private conventicles. The papists also enjoyed the lenity of his government; and though the laws against them continued to subsist, yet they were seldom put into rigorous execution. What was criminal in James was virtuous in his successor: James only wanted to introduce persecution, by pretending to disown it; William was averse to persecution from principle, and none suffered for religious opinions during his reign.

But though William was acknowledged in England, Scotland was still undetermined. The parliament of that country, however, soon recognised his authority, and took that opportunity to abolish episcopacy, which had been long disagreeable to the nation. Nothing now remained to the deposed monarch, of all his former dominions, but Ireland. His cause was espoused by all the catholics of that country, who were much more numerous there than those of the protestant persuasion. The king of France, either touched with compassion for his sufferings, or willing to weaken a rival kingdom by promoting its internal dissensions, granted James a fleet and some troops, to assert his claims there. On the seventh day of May this