

Defoe Daniel

**An Answer to a Question that
Nobody thinks of, viz., But what
if the Queen should Die?**



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AN ANSWER TO A QUESTION, &c

That we are to have a peace, or that the peace is made, what sort of peace, or how it has been brought about; these are questions the world begins to have done with, they have been so much, so often, and to so little purpose banded about, and tossed like a shuttlecock, from one party to another; the parties themselves begin to want breath to rail and throw scandal. Roper and Ridpath, like two Tom T – men, have thrown night-dirt at one another so long, and groped into so many Jakes's up to their elbows to find it, that they stink now in the nostrils of their own party. They are become perfectly nauseous to read; the nation is surfeited of them, and the people begin to be tired with ill-using one another. Would any tolerable face appear upon things, we might expect the people would be inclined to be easy; and were the eyes of some great men open, they may see this was the opportunity they never had before, to make the nation easy, and themselves safe. The main thing which agitates the minds of men now, is the protestant succession and the pretender. Much pains have been taken on both sides to amuse the world about this remaining dispute; one side to make us believe it is safe, and the other to convince us it is in danger. Neither side hath been able to expatiate upon the part they affirm. Those who say the protestant succession is secure, have not yet shown us any step taken, since these new transactions, for its particular security. Those who say it is in danger, have not so clearly determined, even among themselves, from what particular head of public management that danger chiefly proceeds. Both these uncertainties serve to perplex us, and to leave the thing more undetermined than consists with the public ease of the people's minds. To contribute something to that ease, and bring those whose place it is to consider of ways to make the people easy in this case, this work is made public. Possibly, the question propounded may not meet with a categorical answer. But this is certain, it shall show you more directly what is the chief question which the substance of things before us is like to turn upon; and to which all our questions seem to tend. Were the great difficulty of the succession brought to a narrow compass, though we might spend fewer words about it, we should sooner come to a direct answer. Before I come to the great and chief question upon which this affair so much seems to turn, it seems needful to put the previous question upon which so much debate has been among us, and let that be examined. This previous question is this: Is there any real danger of the protestant succession? Is there any danger that the pretender shall be brought in upon us? Is there any danger of popery and tyranny, by restoring the son, as they call him, of abdicated King James? This is the previous question, as we may now call it. It is well known that there are some people among us, who are so far from allowing that there is any such danger as the said question mentions, that they will have it to be a token of disaffection to the government to put the question, and are for loading whoever shall offer to start such a question, with characters and party-marks odious to good men, such as incendiary, promoter of discontents, raiser of faction, divider of the people, and the like: names which the writer of these sheets, at the same time, both contemns and abhors. He cannot see that he is any enemy to the queen, in inquiring as diligently as possible, whether there are any attempts to depose her, or dangerous prospects of bringing in the hated rival of her glory and dominion. It is so far from that, that it is apparently the duty of every true subject of her majesty, to inquire seriously, whether

the public peace, the queen's safety, her throne, or her person, is in any danger from the wicked design of her, and her people's enemies. Wherefore, and for the joint concern every protestant Briton has in this thing, I shall make no difficulty, plainly and seriously to state, and to answer this previous question, viz., Whether there is any danger of the protestant succession from the present measures, and from the present people concerned? I am not ignorant of what has been said by some, to prove that the present ministry cannot be suspected of having any view to the pretender in any of their measures. The best reason which I have seen given upon that subject, is, that it is not their interest; and that as we have not found them fools that are blind to their own interest; that either do not understand, or pursue it. This we find handled sundry ways, by sundry authors, and very much insisted upon as a foundation for us to build upon. We shall give our thoughts upon it with plainness, and without fear or favour. Good manners require we should speak of the ministry with all due regard to their character and persons. This, a tract designed to inquire seriously of a weighty and essential, not a trifling thing, which requires but a trifling examination; nor shall it be handled here with satire and scurrility. We approve neither of the flatteries of one side, nor the insultings of the other. We shall readily and most willingly join with those who are of opinion that it is not the interest of the ministry to be for the pretender, and that the ministry are not blind to, or careless of, their own interest; and consequently, that the ministry cannot be for the pretender. This I hope may be called a direct answer. When I say "cannot," I must not be understood potentially, that they have no moral capacity; but they cannot without such inconsistencies, contradictions, and improbable things happening in, which render it highly irrational so much as to suppose it of them. To shut the door against any possibility of cavil, it may be needful also to take it with us as we go, what we mean by the words "be for" the pretender; and this can be no otherwise understood, than to have a design, however remote, and upon whatever views, to bring him in to possess the throne of these kingdoms. The matter then being laid down thus, as sincerely and plainly as possible, we come to the question point-blank, and think it our duty to say with the greatest sincerity, that we do not believe the ministry are in any kind, or with any prospect, near or remote, acting for or with a design or view to bring in the pretender. Having granted this, we must, however, to prevent any breaking in, by way of cavil on one hand, or triumph on the other, subjoin immediately, that we do not in the least grant by this that the protestant succession is in no danger, even from several of the measures now taken in the world. It is far from any reflection upon the ministry to say that, however they may act upon a right sincere principle for the protestant succession in all they do, which, as above, we profess to believe, yet that many of the tools they make use of are of another make, and have no edge to cut any other way; no thoughts to move them towards any other end; no other centre, which they can have any tendency to; that the pretender's interest is the magnet which draws them by its secret influence to point to him as their pole; that they have their aim at his establishment here, and own it to be their aim; and as they are not shy to profess it among themselves, so their conduct in many things makes it sufficiently public. This is not meant as any reflection upon the ministry for making use of such men: the late ministry did the same, and every ministry will, and must employ men sometimes, not as they always join with them in their politic principles, but as either the men are found useful in their several employments, or as the ministry may be under other circumstances, which makes it necessary to them to employ them. Nor, as the Review well enough observed, does it follow that because the ministry have employed or joined with jacobites in the public affairs, that therefore they must have done it with a jacobite principle. But let the ministry employ these men by what necessity, or upon what occasion they will, though it may not follow that the ministry are therefore for the pretender, yet it does not also follow that there is no danger of the protestant succession from the employing those sort of people: For, what if the queen should die?

The ministry, it is hoped, are established in the interest of their queen and country; and therefore it has been argued, that supposing the ministry had the pretender in their eye, yet that

it is irrational to suggest that they can have any such view during the life of her present majesty. Nay, even those professed jacobites, who we spoke of just now, cannot be so ungrateful to think of deposing the queen, who has been so bountiful, so kind, so exceeding good to them, as in several cases to suffer them to be brought into the management of her own affairs, when by their character they might have been thought dangerous, even to her person; thus winning and engaging them by her bounty, and the confidence that has been placed in them, not to attempt anything to her prejudice, without the most monstrous ingratitude, without flying in the face of all that sense of honour and obligation, which it is possible for men of common sense to entertain. And it can hardly be thought that even papists themselves, under the highest possessions of their religious zeal, can conquer the native aversions they must have to such abominable ingratitude, or to think of bringing in the pretender upon this protestant nation, even while the queen shall be on the throne. But though this may, and some doubt that also, tie up their hands during the queen's life, yet they themselves give us but small reason to expect anything from them afterward, and it will be hard to find anybody to vouch for them then. These very jacobites, papists, and professed enemies to the revolution, may be supposed upon these pretensions to be quiet, and offer no violence to the present establishment while her majesty has the possession, and while that life lasts, to which they are so much indebted for her royal goodness and clemency. But what would they do if the queen should die?

Come we next to the French king. We are told, that not the French king only, but even the whole French nation, are wonderfully forward to acknowledge the obligation they are under to the justice and favour which they have received from her majesty, in the putting an end to the war; a war which lay heavy upon them, and threatened the very name of the French nation with ruin, and much more threatened the glory of the French court, and of their great monarch, with an entire overthrow, a total eclipse. A war which, by their own confession, it was impossible for them long to have supported the expenses of, and which, by the great superiority of the allies, became dreadful to them, and that every campaign more than the other; a war which they were in such pain to see the end of, that they tried all the powers and courts in Christendom, who were the least neutral, to engage a mediation in order to a treaty, and all in vain; and a war which, if her majesty had not inclined to put an end to, must have ended perhaps to the disadvantage and confusion of both France and Spain, if not of all Christendom. The obligations the French are under for the bringing this war to so just and honourable a conclusion are not at all concealed. Nay, the French themselves have not been backward to make them public. The declarations made by the French king of his sincerity in the overtures made for a general peace, the protestations of his being resolved to enter into an entire confidence, and a league offensive and defensive with the queen's majesty for the preservation of the peace of Christendom, his recognition of her majesty's just right to the crown, his entering into articles to preserve the union, acknowledging the ninth electorate in favour of the house of Hanover, and joining in the great affair of the protestant succession. As these all convince the world of the necessity his affairs were reduced to, and the great advantages accruing to him by a peace, so they seem to be so many arguments against our fears of the French entering into any engagements against the crown of Britain, much less any against the possession of the queen during her life. Not that the honour and sincerity of the king of France is a foundation fit for her majesty or her people to have any dependence upon; and the fraction of former treaties by that court, when the glory of that monarch, or his particular views of things has dictated such opportunity to him as he thought fit to close with, are due cautions to us all not to have any dependence of that kind. But the state of his affairs, and the condition the war has reduced him to, may give us some ground to think ourselves safe on that side. He knows what power he has taken off from his enemies in making peace with her majesty; he knows very well with what loss he sits down, how his affairs are weakened, and what need he has to take breath after so terrible a war; besides the flame such an action would kindle again in Europe; how it would animate this whole British nation against him, in such a manner, and endanger bringing in a new war, and perhaps a new confederacy upon him

so violently, and that before he would be in a condition to match them, that no one can reasonably suppose the French king will run the hazard of it. And these things may tend to make some people easier than ordinary in the affair of the succession, believing that the French king stands in too much need of the favour of the queen of Great Britain, whose power it well behoves him to keep in friendship with him, and whose nation he will be very cautious of provoking a third time, as he has already done twice, to his fatal experience. All these things, we say, may seem pretty well to assure us that nothing is to be feared on that side so long as her majesty lives to sit upon the British throne. But all leaves our grand question unanswered; and though we may argue strongly for the French king's conduct while the present reign continues, yet few will say, What he will do if the queen should die?

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