

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE, THE SUPREME AUTHORITY OF THIS NATION,
THE COMMONS OF ENGLAND
in Parliament assembled.



The humble Petition of firm and constant Friends to the Parliament and Common-wealth, Presenters and Promoters of the late Large Petition of September 11. MDCXLVIII.

Sheweth,

That having seriously considered how many large and fair opportunities this honourable House hath had within these eight yeers last past to have made this Nation absolute free and happy; and yet that until this time, every of those opportunities have (after some short space of hope) faded, and but altered, if not increased our bondage.

When we call to mind what extraordinary things the Army undertook (and this honourable House approved) in behalf of the liberties of the people, in the year 1647. and that nevertheless, the first fruits of their great and unexpected success, was a more oppressive Ordinance for enforcing of Tyths, than ever had bin before, and which hath bin severely executed, and is still continued, to the extreme vexation of Friends, and encouragement of Pulpit Incendiaries; And how that great and wonderful opportunities wasted it self away in contending with, and imprisoning of cordial Friends, or in tampering with known enemies, and at length ended in a most dangerous and bloody war; whereas rightly applied, it might have given peace and security to the Nation for many Generations.

These things considered, although we exceedingly rejoiced in your just and excellent Votes of the 4. of this instant *January*, as a people who had long suffered the reproches of Sectaries & Levellers, for maintaining the supreme original of all just power to be in the people, & the supreme Authority of this Nation to be in this honourable House, (which our burnt Petitions, and that of *Sept. 11.* do fully witness. Yet since we understand, that within few daies after you admitted a message from the House of Lords, and gave an accustomed respect thereunto. We have bin very much troubled, how already the same doth essentially derogate from your foresaid Votes.

And since also, we have seen a printed Warrant of his Excellency the Lord General *Fairfax*, directed to his Marshal General, for suppressing of unlicensed Books and Pamphlets, authorising him (upon the oath of one witness) to take all persons offending into custody, and inflict upon them such corporal punishments, and levie such fines upon them, as your Ordinances impose; and not to discharge them, until after payment and punishment: And further, to make diligent search in all places where the said Marshal shall think meet, for unlicensed printing presses, employed in printing scandalous, unlicensed pamphlets, Books, &c. and to seise and carry away such printing presses, &c. And likewise to make diligent search in all suspected printing houses, ware-houses, and other shops and places whatsoever, for such unlicensed books, &c. And in case of opposition, to break open (according to your Ordinances) all dores and locks, and to apprehend all persons so opposing, and take them into custody, till they have given satisfaction therein. And all this by vertue of an order of yours of the fift of this instant *January*. Since we have seen this, we profess, we cannot but already fear the issue and consequence of those excellent Votes, nothing more dangerous to a people, than the mis-application of their supreme entrusted Authority; and therefore we entreat herein to be excused, though we appear herein, as in a cause of very great Importance.

For what-ever specious pretences of good to the Common-wealth, have bin devised to over-aw the Press, yet all times fore-gone will manifest, it hath ever ushered in a tyrannie; mens mouths being to be kept from making noise, whilst they are robd of their liberties; So was it in the late Prerogative times before this Parliament, whilst upon pretence of care of the publike, Licensers were set over the Press, Truth was suppressed, the people thereby kept ignorant, and fitted only to serve the unjust ends of Tyrants and Oppressers, whereby the Nation was enslaved: Nor did any thing beget those oppressions so much opposition, as unlicensed Books and Pamphlets.

A short time after the beginning of this Parliament, upon pretense of publike good, and at the solicitation of the Company of Stationers (who in all times have bin officiously instrumental unto Tyrannie) the Press again (notwithstanding the good service it immediately before had done) was most ungratefully committed to the custody of Licensers, when though scandalous Books from or in behalf of the Enemy then at *Oxford* was the pretended occasion; yet the first that suffered was *M. Lawrence Sanders*, for Printing without license, a book intituled, *Gods Love to Mankind*; and not long after, *M. John Lilburn*, *M. William Larnar*, and *M. Richard Overton*, and others, about books discovering the then approaching Tyrannie; whilst scandalous Pamphlets nevertheless abounded, and did the greater mischief, in that Licensers have never bin so free to pass, as good men have bin forward to compile proper and effectual answers to such books and pamphlets: And whether Tyrannie did soon follow thereupon, the courses you were forced unto in opposition, and the necessities you were put upon for your preservation, will most cleerly demonstrate. And if you, and your Army shall be pleased to look a little back upon affairs, you will find you have bin very much strengthened all along by unlicensed Printing; yea, that it hath done (with greatest danger to the doers) what it could to preserve you, when licensed did its utmost to destroy you; and we are very confident, those very excellent and necessary Votes of yours fore-mentioned, had made you a multitude of enemies, if unlicensed printing had not prepared and smoothed your way for them, whereas now they are received with great content and satisfaction.

And generally, as to the whole course of printing, as justly in our apprehensions, may Licensers be put over all publike or private Teachings, and Discourses, in Divine, Moral, Natural, Civil, or Political things, as over the Press; the liberty whereof appears so essential unto Freedom, as that without it, its impossible to preserve any Nation from being liable to the worst of bondage; for what may not be done to that people who may not speak or write, but at the pleasure of Licensers?

As for any prejudice to Government thereby, if Government be just in its Constitution, and equal in its distributions, it will be good, if not absolutely necessary for them, to hear all voices and judgements, which they can never do, but by giving freedom to the Press; and in case any abuse their authority by scandalous Pamphlets, they will never want able Advocates to vindicate their innocency. And therefore all things being duely weighed, to refer all Books and Pamphlets to the judgement, discretion, or affection of Licensers, or to put the least restraint upon the Press, seems altogether inconsistent with the good of the Common-wealth, and expressly opposite and dangerous to the liberties of the people, and to be carefully avoided, as any other exorbitancy or prejudice in Government.

And being so, we beseech you to consider how unreasonable it is for every man or woman to be liable to punishment, penal or corporal, upon one witness in matters of this Nature, for compiling, printing, selling or dispersing of Books and Pamphlets, nay to deserve even whipping (as the last yeers Ordinance, an Engine fitted to a Personal Treaty) doth provide a punishment, as we humbly conceive, fit only for slaves or bondmen. But that this honourable House, that is now by an extraordinary means freed from that major part, (which degenerating from the true Interest of the people, were the unhappy authors of that Ordinance) and reduced to that minor part, which we alwaies hoped did really oppose the same, should now approve thereof, and of all other Ordinances of like nature; and not onely so, but in cases so meerly Civil, to refer the execution thereof to a Military power; This is that which in the present sense and consequence thereof, afflicts us above measure; because according to this rule, we may we know not how soon, be reduced under a military jurisdiction, which we humbly conceive, we ought not to be, and which above any thing in this world, we shall desire in this and all other cases for ever to avoid.

And therefore we most earnestly entreat, First, That as you have voted your selves the supreme Authority, so you will exactly preserve the same entire in it self, without intermixing again with any other whatsoever.

Secondly, That you will precisely hold your selves to the supreme end, the Freedom of the People; as in other things, so in that necessary and essential part, of speaking, writing, printing, and publishing their minds freely; without setting of Masters, Tutors, and Controulers over them; and for that end, to revoke all Ordinances and Orders to the contrary.

Thirdly, That you will fix us onely in a Civil Jurisdiction, referring the Military to A&A distinct, and within it self, except in cases of warlike opposition to Civil Authority.

Fourthly, That you will recal that oppressive Ordinance for Tyths, upon treble damages; that so, as we have rejoiced in the notion, we may not have cause to grieve, but to rejoyce also in the exercise of your supreme Authority; and that the whole Nation in this blessed opportunity may receive a full reward of true Freedom for its large expense of bloud and treasure, and by your Wisdom and Fidelity, be made happy to all Future Generations.

Die Jovis, January 18. 1648.

The House being informed that divers Inhabitants within the Citie of London and Borough of Southwark, were at the Dore; they were called in, and then presented a Petition to this House; which after the Petitioners were Withdrawn, was read, and was intituled, The humble Petition of firm and constant to Parliament and Common-wealth, the Presenters and Promoters of the late large Petition of September 11. 1648.

Ordered by the Commons assembled in Parliament, that the said Petition be referred to the Committee appointed yesterday to consider of Petitions of this nature.

Hen. Scobell Cler. Parl. Dom. Com.

The Petitioners being again called in, M. Speaker by command of this House gave them this answer. Gentlemen, The House have read your Petition, and have referred it to a Committee to consider of the matter of consequence therein; and have taken notice of your continued good affections to this House, and they have commanded me to give you thanks for your good affections, and I do accordingly give you thanks for your good affections.

Hen. Scobell Cleric. Parl. Dom. Com.