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A Dissertation upon Parties

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Sir,

To corrupt and to divide are the trite and wicked expedients, by which some ministers in all ages have affected to govern; but especially such as have been least capable of exerting the true arts of government. There is however a difference to be made between these two expedients, to the advantage of the latter, and by consequence between the characters of those who put them in practice.

Every busy, ambitious child of fortune, who hath himself a corrupt heart, and becomes master of a large purse, hath all that is necessary to employ the expedient of corruption with success. A bribe, in the hand of the most blundering coxcomb that ever disgraced honour and wealth and power, will prevail as much as in the hand of a man of sense, and go farther too, if it weigh more. An intriguing chamber-maid may slip a bank-note into a gripping paw, as well as the most subtle demon of hell. H—e² may govern as triumphantly by this expedient as the great knight his brother, and the great knight as Burghley himself.³

But every character cannot attempt the other expedient of dividing, or keeping up divisions, with equal success. There is, indeed, no occasion for any extraordinary genius to divide; and true wisdom despises the infamous task. But there is need of that left-handed wisdom, called cunning,⁴ and of those habits in business, called experience. He that is corrupted, co-operates with him that corrupts. He runs into his arms at the first beckon; or, in order sometimes to raise the price, he meets him but half way. On the other hand, to divide, or to maintain and renew the divisions of parties in a state, a system of seduction and fraud is necessary to be carried on. The divided are so far from being accessory to the guilt, that they would not be divided, if they were not first deceived.

¹ *Craftsman* 382 (27 October 1733).

² H[orac]e: Horatio Walpole (1678–1757), diplomat and long-standing Whig MP (1702–56), younger brother of Sir Robert Walpole.

³ Sir Robert Walpole was frequently compared to Elizabeth I's chief minister, William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–98), though usually in a positive light, as the loyal, upwardly mobile defender of the cause of Protestantism and the crown.

⁴ 'We take cunning for a sinister or crooked wisdom': Bacon, *Essays*, 'Of Cunning' in *Francisci Baconis . . . Opera Omnia* (4 vols., London, 1730), III, 332 (compare *Idea of a Patriot King*, p. 255).

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From these differences, which I have observed between the two expedients, and the characters and means proper to put them in practice with success, it may be discovered perhaps why, upon former occasions, as I shall hereafter show, the expedient of dividing prospered so much better than that of corrupting; and why, upon some later occasions, the expedient of corrupting succeeds so well in those hands, which are not, and I trust will not be so lucky in maintaining or renewing our party divisions.

Much hath been written by you, Mr D'Anvers,⁵ by your correspondents and others, who have drawn their pens in the cause of truth, virtue, and liberty, against the right reverend, as well as undignified, the noble, as well as ignoble assertors of corruption; enough surely to shame those who have not lost all sense of shame, out of so ignominious a crime; and to make those who have not lost every other sense tremble at the consequences of it. We may flatter ourselves that those honest endeavours have had some effect; and have reason to hope that far greater will follow from those illustrious examples of repulses which have been lately given to the grand corrupter, notwithstanding his frequent and insolent declarations that he could seduce whomsoever he had a mind to gain. These hopes are farther confirmed to us by repeated declarations of the sense of Parliament, and will be turned, we doubt not, into certainty, whenever the wisdom of the two Houses shall again think it proper to raise new barriers of law against this encroaching vice.

In the meantime, I think nothing can better answer the design of your papers, nor promote the public good more effectually in the present conjuncture, than to put our countrymen frequently on their guard against the artifice which is clumsily, but industriously employed to maintain, and, if it be possible, to create new divisions amongst them. That day, which our fathers wished to see, and did not see, is now breaking upon us. Shall we suffer this light to be turned again into party-darkness by the incantations of those who would not have passed for conjurers, even in the days of superstition and ignorance? The nation is not only brought into an uniformity of opinion concerning the present administration, by the length and the righteous conduct of it; but we are grown into a unanimity about principles of government, which the most sanguine could

⁵ Caleb D'Anvers, the pseudonymous editor of *The Craftsman*.

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scarce have expected, without extravagance. Certain associations of ideas were made so familiar to us, about half a century ago, and became in the course of time so habitual, that we should not have been able, even a few years ago, to break them, nor have been easily induced to believe, on the faith of any prediction, that experience and the evidence of facts would, in a few years more, break them for us, destroy all our notions of party, and substitute new ones in their room.

The power and majesty of the people, an original contract, the authority and independency of Parliament, liberty, resistance, exclusion, abdication, deposition; these were ideas associated, at that time, to the idea of a Whig, and supposed by every Whig to be incommunicable, and inconsistent with the idea of a Tory.

Divine, hereditary, indefeasible right, lineal succession, passive-obedience, prerogative, non-resistance, slavery, nay and sometimes property too, were associated in many minds to the idea of a Tory, and deemed incommunicable and inconsistent in the same manner, with the idea of a Whig.

But now that which neither side would have believed on the faith of any prediction, is come to pass:

... quod divum promittere nemo
Auderet, volvenda dies en! attulit ultro.⁶

These associations are broken; these distinct sets of ideas are shuffled out of their order; new combinations force themselves upon us; and it would actually be as absurd to impute to the Tories the principles, which were laid to their charge formerly, as it would be to ascribe to the projector and his faction the name of Whigs, whilst they daily forfeit that character by their actions. The bulk of both parties are really united; united on principles of liberty, in opposition to an obscure remnant of one party, who disown those principles, and a mercenary detachment from the other, who betray them.

How this change for the better comes to have been wrought in an age, when most things have changed for the worse; and since it hath been wrought, why the old distinctions are kept up in some measure, will I think be accounted for in treating this subject far-

⁶ 'See! The onward roll of time has brought you something which no god would have dared to promise': Virgil, *Aeneid*, ix. 6–7.

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ther. At present, what shall we say to these who publicly speak of this national union as impracticable and chimerical, yet privately act against it, with all their might, as a practicable thing, and a real evil to them? If it be as complete and as well cemented, as I imagine it is, and as every honest Briton wishes it may be; nay, if there be nothing more than a strong tendency on all sides towards it, which no man of the least observation and candour will deny; it is surely the duty of every one, who desires the prosperity of his country, to seize the opportunity to cultivate and improve it. If men are to be known by their works, the works of those, who oppose this union, denote them sufficiently. Wicked and unhappy men! who seek their private safety, in opposing public good. Weak and silly men! who vainly imagine that they shall pass for the nation, and the nation for a faction; that they shall be judged in the right, and the whole body of the people in the wrong – On whom would they impose? – How long do they imagine that so unequal a contest can last?

There is no complaint which hath been more constantly in the mouths, no grief hath lain more heavily at the hearts of all good men, than those about our national divisions; about the spirit of party, which inspires animosity and breeds rancour; which hath so often destroyed our inward peace, weakened our national strength, and sullied our glory abroad. It is time therefore that all, who desire to be esteemed good men, and to procure the peace, the strength and the glory of their country by the only means, by which they can be procured effectually, should join their efforts to heal our national divisions, and to change the narrow spirit of party into a diffusive spirit of public benevolence.

That we may be more encouraged to do so, it will be of use perhaps to consider, in some particulars, what advances are already made towards that national union, without which no national good can be expected in such circumstances as ours.

Let us begin with the present temper of the members of the Church of England towards the Dissenters. Those laws, by which the latter were debarred from serving God after their own way, have not been these many years a terror to them.⁷ Those which

⁷ These laws included the Quaker Act (1662); the First and Second Conventicles Acts (1664; 1670); the 'Five Mile' Act (1665); the First and Second Test Acts (1673; 1678); the Occasional Conformity Act (1711; repealed 1719); and the Schism Act (1714; repealed 1719).

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were designed to hinder the propagation of their principles, and those which shut the door of all public preferment, even to such amongst them as conformed occasionally, are repealed. Far from desiring to impose any new hardships upon them, even those who have been reputed their enemies, and who have acted as such on several occasions, acknowledge their error. Experience hath removed prejudice. They see that indulgence hath done what severity never could; and from the frankness of these, if I was a Dissenter, I should sooner entertain hopes of future favour, than from the double dealing of those who lean on the Dissenters when they are out of power, and who esteem them a load upon them when they are in it. We are now in the true and only road, which can possibly lead to a perfect reconciliation among Protestants; to the abolition of all their differences; or to terms of difference so little essential, as to deserve none of distinction. These happy ends must be obtained by mutual good will. They never can be obtained by force. It is true, indeed, that force, which is the effect of a majority and superior power, may support a rivalry and erect even counter-establishments. But then, by the same means, our ancient disputes will be revived; the Church will be thought really in danger;⁸ and religious feuds, which have been so long and so beneficially kept down, will once more disturb the peace of the state. It is a certain truth, that our religious and civil contests have mutually, and almost alternately, raised and fomented each other. Churchmen and Dissenters have sometimes differed, and sometimes thought, or been made to think, that they differed, at least, as much about civil as religious matters. There can be therefore no way so effectual to compose their differences on the latter, as to improve the growing union between them on the former. 'Idem sentire de republica',⁹ to think alike about political affairs, hath been esteemed necessary to constitute and maintain private friendships. It is obviously more essential in public friendships. Bodies of men in the same society can never unite, unless they unite on this principle; and if they once unite on this principle, they will unite on all others, or they will readily and cheerfully make one another easy about them. – Let me

⁸ 'The Church in Danger' was the slogan of high-flying Tories in the reign of Queen Anne.

⁹ '... to feel the same way about the commonwealth': adapted from Cicero, *De Amicitia*, x. 33 ('vel ut de republica non idem sentitur').

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speak plainly. It becomes a man to do so, who means honestly. – In our political divisions of Whig and Tory, the Dissenters have adhered to the former, and they want no apology for doing so. They joined themselves to those with whom they agreed, and stood in opposition to those with whom they differed in principles of government. There could be no objection brought against them on this account. They certainly did not follow power. They did not act like a sect, or a faction, who had, and pursued, an interest distinct from the interest of the whole. Their non-conformity hath nothing to do here. They concurred with conformists; and if they had been conformists themselves, as they were Dissenters, they would have acted in the same manner. But if this division of parties, on the same principles, subsists no longer; if there be in truth neither a Tory, nor a Whig, as I have said above, but a Court and a Country party in being; if the political principles, which the Dissenters have formerly avowed, are manifestly pursued on one side; and those which they have opposed, or others equivalent to them in their effects, are pursued on the other; can the Dissenters hesitate about the option they are to make? I am persuaded they cannot. I know that several amongst them do not. What might be, and certainly would be said, if they made their option to stand by the M—,¹⁰ I will not so much as suggest. What must be the consequence of their standing by the nation, in opposition to him, for between these two powers the present contest lies, it is easy to tell, and impossible to deny. They will prove, in this case, to the whole world, that the spirit of liberty animates, and conscience alone determines their conduct. They, who could never brook a regal, will have the merit of saving their country from a ministerial tyranny; and their country will owe them all the acknowledgements, which are due from good and grateful citizens of the same commonwealth.

As to the other great and national division of Whig and Tory; he, who recollects what hath passed in Parliament, and observes what passes out of it, can differ very little in his opinion from what hath been said concerning it. The principal articles of your civil faith, published some time ago, or, to speak more properly, the civil faith of the Old Whigs,¹¹ are assented and consented to by the

¹⁰ The M[inister]: Sir Robert Walpole.

¹¹ The Old Whig canon comprised the works of James Harrington, Henry Nevile, James Tyrrell, Robert Molesworth, Andrew Fletcher, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, Walter Moyle, Algernon Sidney, Edmund Ludlow and John Toland.

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Country party; and I say, upon good authority, that if this creed was made a test of political orthodoxy, there would appear at this time but very few heretics amongst us. How different the case is on the other side, will appear not only from the actions, but from the principles of the Court-party, as we find them avowed in their writings;¹² principles more dangerous to liberty, though not so directly, nor so openly levelled against it, than even any of those, bad as they were, which some of these men value themselves for having formerly opposed.

In short, the Revolution is looked upon by all sides as a new era; but the settlement then made is looked upon by the whole Country party as a new Magna Carta, from whence new interests, new principles of government, new measures of submission, and new obligations arise. From thence we must date both king and people. His majesty derives his title from Acts, made in consequence of it.¹³ We likewise derive, not our privileges, for they were always ours, but a more full and explicit declaration, and a more solemn establishment of them from the same period. On this foundation all the reasonable, independent Whigs and Tories unite. They could unite on this alone; for the Whigs have always professed the principles which paved the way for the Revolution; and whatever the Tories may have professed, they acted upon the same principles, or they acted upon none, which would be too absurd to assert, when they brought about that great event, in concert with the rest of the nation, as I shall some time or other prove.

To this Magna Carta, and these principles, let us adhere inviolably, in opposition to the two extremes mentioned by me at the beginning of this letter, viz. to those who disown them, and to those who betray them. – Let neither the polemical skill of Leslie,¹⁴ nor the antique erudition of Bedford,¹⁵ persuade us to put on again those old shackles of false law, false reason, and false gospel, which

¹² Prominent ministerialist writers included William Arnall, Ralph Courteville, Benjamin Hoadly, Matthew Concanen, Lord Hervey, James Pitt and Horace Walpole; the main pro-government organs were *The British Journal*, *The Free Briton*, *The London Journal* and *The Daily Gazetteer*.

¹³ The Bill of Rights (1689) and the Act of Settlement (1701).

¹⁴ Charles Leslie (1650–1722), Irish-born non-juring religious and political controversialist, editor of *The Rehearsal*, defender of patriarchalism and hereditary succession.

¹⁵ Hilckiah Bedford (1663–1724), non-juring divine and presumed author of *The Hereditary Right of the Crown of England Asserted* (1713) (in fact, by George Harbin), which Bolingbroke attacks in 'Letter VIII' below.

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were forged before the Revolution, and broken to pieces by it. – As little let us suffer the arch slyness of G—,¹⁶ the dogmatical dryness of H—¹⁷ or the sousing prostitution of S—¹⁸ to slip new shackles on us, which are inconsistent with the constituent principles of our establishment.¹⁹ – Let us maintain and improve the national union, so happily begun, and bless God for disposing the temper of the nation almost universally to it. – Such a coalition hath been long wanted in this kingdom, and never more than at this important crisis; for on this it will depend whether they, who not only oppose the progress of that growing corruption, which had well nigh overspread the land, but endeavour to extirpate it by the roots, shall prevail; or they who nourish and propagate it, who eat themselves, and tempt others to eat the baneful fruit it bears. – On this it will depend whether they shall prevail, who constantly insist against the continuance of a standing army in time of peace, agreeably to the principles of our constitution; or they who plead for it, and endeavour to make it a necessary part of that constitution, though incompatible with public liberty. – On this it will depend whether they shall prevail, who endeavour to conceal the frauds which are practised, and to screen the fraudulent, at the risk of ruining credit, and destroying trade, as well as to monopolize in the hands of a few the whole wealth of the nation; or they who do their utmost to bring the former to light, and the latter to punishment, at a time when glaring fraud, or very strong symptoms of fraud, appear in so many parts of public management, from some of the greatest companies down to the turnpike at Hyde Park Corner. – On this it will depend whether they shall prevail, who desire that Great Britain should maintain such a dignity and prudent reserve in the broils of Europe, as become her situation, suit her interest, and alone can enable her to cast the balance; or they who are eager, on every

¹⁶ Edmund ‘Codex’ Gibson (1669–1748), antiquarian and divine, author of the *Codex Iuris Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (1713), known as ‘Walpole’s pope’ when bishop of London.

¹⁷ Francis Hare (1671–1740), Walpole’s tutor at Cambridge, bishop of St Asaph and, latterly, Chichester, author of *Church Authority Vindicated* (1713) and *Scripture Vindicated from the Misrepresentation of the Bishop of Bangor* (1721).

¹⁸ Thomas Sherlock (1678–1761), Walpole’s schoolfriend, Gibson’s successor as bishop of London, and (like Hare) one of the main antagonists of Benjamin Hoadly in the Bangorian controversy over the authority of the Church.

¹⁹ Compare Pope, *The Dunciad* (1742), III, 204–5: ‘Still break the benches, Henley! with thy strain, / While Sherlock, Hare, and Gibson preach in vain.’