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978-1-107-45354-8 - A Letter to a Dissenter: Upon Occasion of his Majesty's Late
Gracious Declaration of Indulgence

Sir George Savile

Frontmatter

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Upon occasion of His Majesty's late
gracious Declaration of Indulgence

[By SIR GEORGE SAVILE, BART.
FIRST MARQUIS OF HALIFAX]
(1687)

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

JAMES II originally intended to secure toleration (and supremacy) for the Roman Catholics by the help of the Anglican Church. His idea seems to have been a Church Roman in doctrine, with some privileges of a Gallican sort. Given the principle of passive obedience then in fashion among churchmen, they could not logically refuse to acquiesce in anything he might please to do. But logic is one thing, practical politics another. Their fears were roused by the activity and insolence of the Jesuit cabal, by the excessive favour shewn them at court, and by the King's evident determination to pack the public service and the army with Roman Catholics in defiance of law. The breach was completed by the suspension of Compton (Sept. 1686) and the dismissal of the King's own brother in law Rochester (Jan. 1687) for refusing to become a Roman Catholic.

So James changed his tactics. If the Church would not help him, the Dissenters might. They had been persecuted of late with unusual severity, and ought to be grateful for relief. So (April 4, 1687) there came out a Declaration of Indulgence. In this King James explains that constraint of

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conscience had always been contrary to his inclination, promises to maintain the Church, and guarantees all men their lands and properties—the abbey lands in particular. To carry out this liberal policy, he “thinks fit, by virtue of Our royal prerogative,” to suspend all penal laws and all tests affecting Nonconformists and recusants (Papists).

It remained for the Nonconformists to make up their minds whether they would side with the King against the Church or with the Church against the King. To help their decision, Halifax wrote his *Letter to a Dissenter* (Aug. 1687).

The present edition is reprinted by permission from Miss Foxcroft's *Life and Letters of Sir George Savile, Bart, first Marquis of Halifax*. Only a few notes have been modified which referred to parts of that work not here reprinted.

H. M. GWATKIN.

November 10, 1909.