



THE BAITING OF THE GREAT BULL OF BASHAN

Unfolded and Presented to the Affecters and approvers of the PETITION of the 11 Sept. 1648.

Especially, to the Citizens of London usually meeting at the Whale-bone in LOTHBURY behind the Royal Exchange,
Commonly (though unjustly) styled LEVELLERS.

By Richard Overton
Close-prisoner in the Tower of LONDON.

Psal. 22. 12. 13. Psal. 68. 28. 30.

Many Bulls have compassed me: strong Bulls of Bashan have beset me round.

They opened their mouths against me as a ravening and a roaring Lion.

Strengthen O God that which thou hast wrought for us. Rebuke the Company of Spearmen, the multitude of the Bulls, with the Calves of the people til every one submit. Scatter thou the people that delight in war.

Imprinted at London, 1649.

Gentlemen,

BEING necessitated (by some over-sudden misdeemings from amongst you) some few dayes since to assett and avow the continuance of my integrity to those sure foundations of Peace and Freedom, offered to the people of this Nation under the forme or draught of an Agreement of the People, May 1. 1649.

It hath happened with me, as with other adventurers into the publick: All pallates are not pleased with that Sheet intituled Overtons Defiance etc. yet falleth it out no other wise then I expected; it seems many are weak and as many are offended, and chiefly with that figurative passage of the Bull; especially at the word Pox; but they need not much, did they but also take into their thoughts, the adulterous and wicked generation, on whom that Metaphor is made good, a people whose heart is waxed grosse, and their ears dull of hearing, having closed their eyes, least at any time they should see, hear, understand and be converted.

To such a people Christ spake not but in Parables: why then to such might not I use the Figure of the Bull of Bason, or rather of the Bull-baiting, with all the circumstances Emphasis Gratia thereunto appertaining? But ther's uncivill language, such as becommeth not the Gospell of Christ. I answer (my Brethren) he or she (how pure or nice soever to the eye) that is not guilty of reall grosse incivilities both in word and deed, let him or her throw the first stone at that seeming incivillity, for at most you can make it but so in appearance, and no like is the same. The figure is but the shell; will you not crack the shell to take out the kernell? passe through the Parable to the Morall thereof? I, but it jears and thats not the language of Canaan; and be it so: Is it not recorded that Eliah mocked the Priests of Baal, and said, Cry aloud for he is god, either he is talking or he is pursuing his Enemy, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be waked.

Sure this was a jear to some purpose: here Eliah bid them cry aloud etc. and 'tis justified; then why now may I not cry ha-looe-ha-looe-etc. and not be condemned? What if I had turn'd Fidler in that Paper, Christ himselfe useth the simile of a Piper, saying, we have Piped unto you and ye have not danced (Mat. 11. 17.) And truly I think we (the four poor Sea-green Fiddlers in the Tower) may take up the same saying, We have Piped unto you ever since the first of May, the most pleasant tune of the AGREEMENT of the PEOPLE, but yee have not danced up so roundly as so sprightly a tune deserves. But you will say (it may be) I am still in the language of Ashdod (as perchance you may take it) or that this Dialect is of Consanguinity with the other: Tis true; things (however in themselves) are to others as they are taken. He that should take the Parable of Dives and Lazarus in the bare letter (how known Cannonical soever in its own genuine sence) he must explode it the Scriptures and at best give it but a place in the Apocrypha, for the Letter or character thereof (if that must be the sence) is contradictory to the body of divinity, except you wil say, to beleve that the rich Glutton and the Begger left not their eyes, tongues, fingers, etc. in the grave is Orthodox. And so of my Metaphor of the Bull, the use of the word Genitals, Pox, etc. you may say is uncivill in the Letter, but how uncivill I pray in the Morall? Know yee not that whosoever shall but fasten on the Genitors or Parents of the peoples ruine, so, as to pinch the grand Imposters and deluders of the times, he burns his Fingers, is smit with the Morbus Gallicus of the enslaving Sword; For, what's he, that is precisely honest to the Common-wealth, that can scape persecution? As it hath been of old and is still in things spirituall, He that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution; so he now, that will but faithfully discharge his duty to the publick, shall be sure to be cast upon the Fiery Tryall, that Dogs mouth (as after the Metaphor) shall be sure to be burnt, and tis well he scapes hanging as the time goes.

Now I pray, to how much incivility doth this amount? Is it so worthy your second condemnings as it may not be indulg'd with a favourable eye? Love envyeth not, it judgeth the best; I had thought with two or three merry Jiggs to attempt an uproar in all the laughers in England, but I see you are a company of dull souls, mirth with you is like a Shoulder of Mutton to a sick Horse, or worse, you strait convert into malancholy, trample it under your feet, turne againe, and are (some of you) ready to rent me; He that had cast Pearls before Swine could have expected no lesse.

Indeed, you looked (many of you) upon me as in a Sownd at my close Imprisonment; but truly, when I came abroad with that ignorant Sheet, it found you in a dead sleep, as men in a Trans, portending, as if the Champions of the Eleventh of September had been Sparrow-blasted with the businesse of Burford: and I essayed, to put you out of your dumps, and mind you of the Agreement of the People as the center, or ne plus ultra of all our Engagements; but it seems it proved but as musick to the house of Mourning: yet however, it hath so far gained its end; if by it you wil not be provoked to your duties equally with us, it hath awaked you into a little discourse pro and con, though it be but to point at my weaker parts, and that's better then nothing, if rightly applyed, for ex nibilo nil fit: by this you may take notice of your own infirmities in so wire-drawing of mine: Certainly, it may provoke you to consider of what spirits you are, not unlike such as strain at a Gnat and swallow a Camel, that usually in any discourse passe over what concerneth themselves, though of never so serious and weighty consideration in point of their duties, and betake themselves wholly to spye out the spots and infirmities thereof, and of the Author, and fall foul thereupon, and so sleight their duties, stifle and smother the thing that is good: And now (my tender friends) I pray tell me what Spirit is this? 'tis a foul spirit, away with't for shame; go purge, goe purge; one penniworth of the Agreement of the people, with a little good resolution taken morning and evening, will work out this corruption, cleanse and purifie the bloud, and put a period to this distinction of parties, allay the feude and division of the people, and state us in firme Freedom, Safety and Peace; and then there will be none of this catching and carping, this

lying in wait to snap at infirmities; and till the Agreement be settled, this is not to be expected.

I have known, when things as unserious as my last sheet, drest out in the youthfull attire of mirth, hath found a very large acceptance not only with you, but even with this generation of men, that are now the Enemies of the People; and I think if I have not forgot the Arrangement of Persecution, and some other things of that nature, that I myself have been one of those who have had the honour of such acceptances: But O tempora! O Mores! how few are the same yesterday and to day? successe changeth mens minds as the wind doth the weathercock.

But (my friends) your gravity (which I am affraid hath too much of Melancholy in it) cannot more move me to a more serious Dialect, then my own affections incline me, I prize both in their places; as I affect the one, I respect the other: for sure, modest mirth tempered with due gravity makes the best composition, most naturall and harmonious: God in the temper of our natures as he hath made us Earth, so hath he enlivened that dull lump with the Element of Fire, which is the forma formans, the giver and preserver of being and motion, and the Original of that habit of laughter: Therefore Mirth sure is of Divine instinct, and I think I may boldly say, more naturall then Melancholy, and lesse savours of the Curse. Nature in its Creation was pure and good, void of corruption, or any thing obnoxious or destructive: all misery and mischief came in with the fall, as a Curse upon the Creature, as Death, sorrow, tears, pains, etc, in which number you may reckon on Melancholy, for 'tis both unnaturall and destructive to nature, and so fitly reputed a branch of the Curse, and 'tis the root of the root of all wickednesse, Coveteousnesse; for where have you seen a Melancholy man that's not covetous? and a covetous man seldom proves a good Common-wealths man: yet this ill Weed is gotten into so religious an esteem that all our Religion is turn'd into Melancholy; that, he that cannot whine, pipe, weep and hang down his head like a Bulrush and seem sad unto men, is prophane, light, hath not any thing of God in him, is a Reprobate, is condemned and censured of all, as neither fit for Church nor Common-wealth; And thus comes it to passe; my mirth is heightened to such a transgression, even to cast me under the present Anathama of the now godly party.

But my Brethren of the Sea green Order, take a little wine with your water, and Ile take a little water with my wine, and it will temper us to the best constitution. I wonder what meaneth your late dulnesse of motion, appearing as men in a dream, or as if you were another sort of people then the Authors, promoters, approvers and presenters of the Petition of the 11 of Sept. that people use to be the most active and vigorous People in England for publick Freedom and safety, they use to fear no colours, the more they were prest down the more they prest forward, and the more they encreased; few months have passed that they have not in point of Common-Right produced some eminent peece: but your heads have drooped of late, nothing hath appeared, not one punctilio in supportation ant promotion of the Agreement; deep silence hath covered you; fie, fie; be not cow'd out of your abilities and principles by the present rage of the wicked: compare but the strength of your principles ant the strength of an Army, and tell me which is stronger: How many persecuting powers have fallen before your principles as Dagon before the Ark? and who hath been able to stand before them, even from Episcopacy to this whited and Jesabel like painted Independency? Think you, that this unparallell'd tyranny, under this new name, more fierce and cruel then his fellows, trampling the residue under its feet, that it shall scape the vengeance of Gods wrath more than its Predecessors? no, no; Gods Motto is Semper Idem. Be not therefore dismayed or daunted at the height and magnificence of this insolent faction, the new sons of Perdition, that are set up to deceive if it were possible the very Elect.

It is your own evill and weaknesse, and of those that are Professors and pretenders to the same principles with you, that our Cause is thus under a Cloud: would you all act together, all suffer together, all be as one; and not thus (as some amongst you Commonally use) hang back in the adversity, and be seen in the Van of Prosperity (not daring when the storme rageth, to peep into the tempest for fear of being blowne away) we should not be at this passe with our Cause.

Where there is any thing of venture or hazard, while 'tis in the Embrio, who's not then busie and forward? but when 'tis put upon the personall test for execution, O then one hath bought a piece of ground, and must be excused; another a yoke of Oxen, and he must goe see them; and a third hath married a wife and therefore must please her.

Friends, be not offended, this is a crime deserves your repentance; I condemn you not all, it is but some few; A little Leaven you know leaveneth the whole Lump; therefore do ye beware of the Leaven of the pharisees, it much retardeth your motions and blasteth their fruits the publick is a loser thereby, and your Cause receiveth dammage: let those whom this pincheth, be thereby provoked to amendment, it is worthy their care: For know you not, that it is many hands make light work? If the stresse or weight of the work be laid upon one, or some 3 or 4, it must needs goe on slowly: Why, is not he that's most backward as forward as the best? it is his Cause as much as it is any mans, and thereto in duty as much obliged as any. We are no more concerned than your selves, 'tis but upon the point of common duty (which binds all) to our Country, that we suffer, and we count it our Joy, for that we know we suffer for well-doing, and though we perish in the Work, our Reward shall goe with us, for our Redeemer liveth, and that is our stay. Therefore why stand you still, and are not provoked to this good Emulation; be as active and vigilant, and you shall share in the rejoycing, and 'tis such (I must tell you my Friends) is worth your having; Dulce est pro patria pati.

Fear not those Hills and Mountains that are in your way; it is but your want of faith that they are not removed, and cast into the bottome of the sea: While you lift up your heads, are vigorous and active, your principles present you as Steeples above the rest of the people; every man is a strong Barricado in the way of the Enemy, and your principles flourish and get ground but when you are fearfull, are flat or remisse, then they retire and fade; for they are said to increase or diminish, as they get or lose ground in the understanding or acceptance of others: And this ever take as a sure Rule, That the most vertuous and saving principles in a person most undaunted and faithfull, the more they are suppress, and the more he is persecuted, the more they prosper and spread; of so mighty an efficacy are his sufferings and testimony; as, in the case of Paul is witnessed. Now I would (saith he) ye should understand, Brethren, that the things that hapned unto me, have faln out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the Pallace, and in all other places, and many of the Brethren in the Lord waxed confident by my Bonds, are much-more bold to speak the Word without fear: And this is all the persecutor gaineth upon the undaunted Asserters of righteousness; his own sword is turned into his own bowels: persecution, as the Viper, devoureth its own parent. Then faint ye not (my friends) rouse up your heads and be valiant; lift up your Agreement of the people again, and put it upon the publick stage for promotion and subscription, and doubt not: What man that there is amongst you, that is fearfull and faint-hearted, let him depart your Meetings, and return to his house: the more the Enemy stormeth, the more resolute and vigorous be ye; give them enough of persecution; the more they persecute, the more doe ye appear, that your Bands may be famous; for with fetters, Irons, and prisonwalls you may shake them to pieces; 'tis their tyrannies, cruelties and oppressions must be their Fall, through which you must eat your way for the Agreement.

I highly honor the fidelity and valor of Mr. Chrestopher Chisman, who notwithstanding his Imprisonment, his abuses and sufferings, hath not wrapt up his talent in a napkin, but like a good and faithful servant hath improv'd his imprisonment to the publick advantage; see his Book, entituled, The Lamb contending with the Lion, 'tis worthy your imitation. Let your light (as his) so shine before men, that they may see your good Works, and glorifie your Cause; fear no dangers; the high and mighty Cedars are never able to overtop your principles; what though Ambition hath mounted to the title of Lord Govenour (forsooth) hath not your vigorous principles slain both the Lyon and the Bear, and shall not this uncircumcised Philistine be as one of them?

But (my friends) I am informed those painted Sepulchers of Independency desire your compliance and treaty with them: But touch pitch, and you shall be defiled, have nothing to do with them; touch not, tast not, handle not, which all are to perish with the using; Remember the fidelity of Uriah to David: The Ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in Tents, and my Lord Joab, and the servants of my Lord are encamped in the open fields, shall I then go into my house, to eat and to drink, and to lye with my wife? As thou livest and as thy soul liveth, I wil not do this thing. Your Agreement lyeth half dead in the streets, your friends and its assertors are in prison, with sentinels at their doors, denied the access and visitation of friends, have the catch-poles of the Counsel of State enter their chambers when they are in bed, with Musketteers at their heels, search, rifle, catch and take away any thing that any way they may wrest unto their bloody ends against them, as formerly, and now, the other day (July 4.) they have done, and all the land mourneth and groaneth at the calamity and miseries upon it for want of the settlement of a just constitution of Government; and shall you go unto them (those pests

and vipers of the Nation) to treat or comply? As you live and as your soul liveth you must not do this thing.

While your agreement is trod under their feet, your friends under their cruel captivity, etc. let him that treateth with them amongst you, or with any of their creatures, or keepeth any correspondency with them, be to you as a Reprobate, let the Marke of Cain be set upon him, that every finger may point at him for a Traytor, and a Judas to the people that meeteth him

If a wife or child be like to be destroyed by fire, water, or thieves, he accounts himself base that dare not venture his own life to save theirs: our cause is of a more transcendent value, and we suffer for it; and can you see it destroyed in us, and we for it, and not be as naturall as in a private relation? the lives, liberties, and freedomes of all is contained in it? If your neighbours Oxe or his Asse were in a ditch, it is a shame to passe by and not to help; and behold, here's all in the ditch, then, why venture you not your time, your labours, your monies, etc. to redeeme out all, our Cause, the nation, and us in it, and with it.

I confesse no people in England have been more vigorous, more active and diligent, and more adventurous for the Cause of the Nation, and for our Liberties than most of you: we have been as precious to you as the apple of your eye; you have spared no hazard, no toyle or time to get us at freedome, and I hope we shall never be so ungratefull as not thankfully to remember that service of Love: To you we are obliged in the deepest obligations of any others in England.

But now considering the extream necessity of your still constant unwearied prosecution, I have emboldened my self to presse you forward to the good work of the people, that at this time you may be as vigilant and industrious as at any other, that publick life and spirit may still be preserved and encreased in our cause, even in these worst of times.

And if I have been a little too sharp in my advice, and admonishment, impute it I pray you to the heat of my zeal and ardent affections to the promotion of that Cause; for truly to me it is as the life of my life; without it I'm nothing, with it I live, and therein am

Yours and every mans as my own

RICHARD OVERTON

From my close imprisonment in the tower of London

July the ninth, 1649.

F I N I S.



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