

**A LETTER TO THE RIGHT HON. THE
LORD NORTH, CHANCELLOR OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
CONCERNING SUBSCRIPTION TO
THE XXXIX ARTICLES**

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A Letter to the Right Hon. the Lord North, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, Concerning
Subscription to the XXXIX Articles by George Horne

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GEORGE HORNE

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THE XXXIX ARTICLES**

A
LETTER
TO THE
RIGHT HON. THE LORD NORTH,
CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
CONCERNING
SUBSCRIPTION TO THE XXXIX ARTICLES,
AND PARTICULARLY
THE UNDERGRADUATE SUBSCRIPTION
IN
THE UNIVERSITY.
BY A MEMBER OF CONVOCATION,
*(Generally supposed to be GEORGE HORNE, D.D. the learned President of
Magdalen College.)*
WITH A PREFACE AND NOTES BY THE EDITOR.

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PREFACE.

THIS Letter to Lord North must not be confounded with another, addressed to the same noble Lord in 1772, upon the general subject of Clerical Subscription, the principles of which, like those of all the other Letters and Discourses on the anti-subscription side of the question, are Arian or Socinian. The present Letter has been assigned to the good temper, cultivated talents, and polished style, of George Horne, D.D. the late pious and learned President of Magdalen College, and Bishop of Norwich. Though it be not printed with his Works, and though there can be found no acknowledgments that it came from his pen, Middleton, in his Decads, p. 320, attributes it to Dr. Horne, and the internal evidence confirms that attribution. The allusions to Priestley are in perfect keeping with Dr. Horne's known Letters to that very able and scientific unbeliever. The topics, style, and temper of the Letter are all in unison with those of his known and acknowledged pamphlets; and so strong and clear have these evidences appeared to the Editor, that

he has had no hesitation in following Middleton, and in ascribing it to the late President of Magdalen College.

Perhaps enough may have been already said, to satisfy duties merely editorial ; but the controversies which have been revived of late upon the subject of Subscription to the Articles seem, if not to impose the duty, at least to suggest the usefulness, of entering upon a review of those which occupied the attention of the Church and nation about sixty years ago. The review must be cursory and general ; but it may serve to connect the present with the former questions upon the same subjects ; for the polemics of the present day are but travelling over again the beaten paths of by-gone discussions, and perhaps with knowledge and abilities inferior to those which were possessed by their predecessors in the argument.

If these *Subscription-controversies* were surveyed in their earliest history, they would be found to be coeval with the times which witnessed the accusations of Cartwright and Travers, and the answers of Whitgift and Hooker. Such a retrospect would also embrace the whole of those necessary protective and defensive measures, which, originating in the prudence and fortitude of Archbishops Parker and Whitgift, were pursued with the same firm and discreet resolution during the Primacy of Archbishop Bancroft, and

ultimately led to that most salutary ordinance, which required the test of a subscription to the three Articles of the thirty-sixth Canon, as an evidence of conformity to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Church of England, and as a qualification for orders and offices in that Church, and for Degrees at the Universities.

But for the purpose of setting forth the affinities of the present pamphlet, it will not be necessary to enter upon so remote a period ; neither will it be necessary to dwell upon those later questions concerning the *right sense of Subscription*, in 1712 and afterwards, which, though they differed from the former in principle and purpose, caused new distractions in the Church, but by calling forth the energies of a Waterland, essentially served the cause of truth, and led to the demonstration, that it was not lawful *to subscribe the Articles in an Arian sense*. Though the struggles of the Arian, upon this occasion, differed from those of the Puritan, in every way that men's motives and conduct can be compared, they both agreed in the determination to resist, and if possible to get rid of, Subscription to articulate statements of religious opinion. It is, however, to be observed, that these latter controversies turned altogether upon Trinitarian, not Disciplinary or Calvinistic, points ; and farther, that the objections of Whithy, Whiston, and Clarke were the forerun-

ners and preparers of the way for those more formidable assaults, which were afterwards made by Blackburne, Jebb, Lindsey, Disney, Evanson, and the *Fratres Poloni* of the Feathers' Tavern.

If, for the illustration of this tract, its connection be sought with the discussions of the times in which it was written, and with the causes and occasions of those discussions, it will be necessary to refer to that inauspicious volume, which is said to have produced eighty controversial pamphlets, between 1766 and 1772, *the Confessional* of Francis Blackburne, M.A. Archdeacon of Cleveland. With the same view it will be necessary to revert to the association of the two hundred and fifty Clergymen and Laymen at the Feathers' Tavern in the Strand, which may be said to have grown out of the doctrines of *the Confessional*, and which petitioned Parliament on the 6th of February, 1772, for relief from all subscriptions to all articles of religious doctrine and discipline. Reference must be also made to the motion of Sir William Meredith, on presenting that petition to Parliament, and to the other motion made by the same Baronet in February of the following year, to relieve the Undergraduate Academics of Oxford from their Subscriptions, upon the special grounds of their extreme youth, their ignorance of the Articles, their incompetency to understand them, and their alleged want of instruction upon those subjects.

It may be here observed, that during the two disputatious years, 1772, 1773, controversies were going on upon the subject of Subscriptions both among the Clergy and among dissenting ministers; (for, according to the Toleration Act as it then stood, dissenting teachers were obliged to subscribe all the Articles but the 34th, 35th, 36th, and the first clause of the 20th.) There were controversies also concerning lay as well as clerical Subscription; controversies upon Academic Subscriptions, as they were required at Oxford, and as they were required at Cambridge; in short, it seemed as if, by common consent, a truce had taken place between dissidents upon all other matters, that their energies might be concentrated, and exclusively directed to the question about Subscriptions: and sermon upon sermon, charge upon charge, argument upon argument, were published by the apologists of the Church in proof and support of the reasonableness, the expediency, the necessity, the duty, the scriptural warranties, the primitive practice of subscriptions to articles of faith. And if from so great a number and variety of powerful arguments, a selection were made of those which were read and referred to, at the time of their publication, as works of the greatest interest and ability, a Volume of Tracts on Clerical Subscription might be formed, of very considerable literary merit, and manifest utility.

Neither was the controversy upon the special subject of ACADEMIC Subscriptions less vigorous in its growth, or less abundant in its produce; and if the same course were pursued in selecting able arguments upon and in defence of Graduate and Undergraduate Subscriptions at the Universities, a second Volume of Tracts might be formed, which, though not decorated in every instance with the authors' names, (for these writings were very often published without them,) would furnish in the present day a large and salutary supply of sound opinions, exact information, and conclusive reasonings, upon these subjects. A selection of this sort was actually made, and published, in 1772, entitled, "*A collection of papers, designed to explain and vindicate the present mode of Subscription required by the University of Oxford from all young persons at their Matriculation;*" and little more would be necessary, for the fulfilment of this part of the design, than to reprint what appears to have been very judiciously selected.

It is true, that Subscription at Matriculation is the only subject handled in the arguments of this collection; but that was the vertical point of the controversy as it had been carried on at Oxford, and as such, was very properly selected for special vindication and defence. It was *Undergraduate Subscription* which had most provoked the hostility of the Socinian, and had most abundantly