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The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

I. Lord Falkland - Mr. Hampden.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-50364](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-50364)

D I A L O G U E S

OF THE

D E A D.

D I A L O G U E I.

Lord FALKLAND—Mr. HAMPDEN.

LORD FALKLAND.

ARE not you surprized to see me in Elysium, Mr. Hampden?

MR. HAMPDEN.

I was going to put the same question to your lordship; for doubtless, you thought me a rebel.

LORD FALKLAND.

And certainly you thought me an apostate from the commonwealth, and a supporter of tyranny.

MR. HAMPDEN.

I own I did, and I don't wonder at the severity of your thoughts about me. The heat of the times deprived us both of our natural candour. Yet I will confess to you here, that,
before

Before I died, I began to see in our party enough to justify your apprehensions, that the civil war, which we had entered into from generous motives, from a laudable desire to preserve our free constitution, would end very unhappily, and perhaps, in the issue, destroy that constitution, even by the arms of those who pretended to be most zealous for it.

LORD FALKLAND.

And I will as frankly own to you, that I saw, in the court and camp of the king, so much to alarm me for the liberty of my country, if our arms were successful, that I dreaded a victory little less than I did a defeat, and had nothing in my mouth but the word *peace*, which I constantly repeated with passionate fondness, in every council at which I was called to assist.

See the Letters, in the Sidney Collection, from the earl of Sunderland to his lady.

MR. HAMPDEN.

I wished for peace too, as ardently as your lordship. But I saw no hopes of it. The insincerity of the king and the influence of the queen made it impossible to trust to his promises or declarations. Nay, what reliance could we reasonably have upon laws designed to limit and restrain the power of the crown, after he had violated *the bill of rights*, obtained with such difficulty, and containing so clear an assertion of the privileges which had been in dispute? If his conscience would allow him to break an act of parliament *made to determine the bounds of the royal prerogative*, because he thought *that the royal prerogative could have no bounds*, what legal ties could bind a conscience so prejudiced? or what effectual security could his people obtain against the obstinate malignity of such an opinion, but entirely taking from him *the power of the sword*, and enabling *themselves* to defend the laws he had passed?

LORD FALKLAND.

There is evidently too much truth in what you have said. But, by taking from the king *the power of the sword*, you in reality

X x 2

reality took *all power*. It was converting the government into a *democracy*; and if he had submitted to it, he would only have preserved the name of a king. The sceptre would have been held by those who had the sword; or we must have lived in a state of perpetual anarchy, without any force, or balance in the government; a state which could not have lasted long, but would have ended in a republic or in absolute dominion.

MR. HAMPDEN.

Your reasoning seems unanswerable. But what could we do? Let Dr. Laud and those other court-divines, who directed the king's conscience, and fixed in it such principles, as made him unfit to govern a limited monarchy, though with many good qualities, and some great ones; let them, I say, answer for all the mischiefs they brought upon him and the nation.

LORD FALKLAND.

They were indeed much to blame: but those principles had gained ground before their times, and seemed the principles of our church, in opposition to the Jesuits, who had certainly gone too far in the other extrem.

MR. HAMPDEN.

It is a disgrace to our church to have taken up such opinions; and I will venture to prophesy, that our clergy, in future times, must renounce them, or they will be turned against them by those who mean their destruction. Suppose a Popish king on the throne. Will the clergy adhere to passive obedience and non-resistance? If they do, they deliver up their religion to Rome; if they do not, their practice will confute their own doctrines.

LORD FALKLAND.

Nature, Sir, will in the end be sure to set right whatever opinion contradicts her great laws, let who will be the teacher. But, indeed, the more I reflect on those miserable times in which we both lived, the more I esteem it a favour of Providence

dence to us, that we were cut off so soon. *The most grievous misfortune that can befall a virtuous man, is to be in such a state, that he can hardly so act as to approve his own conduct.* In such a state we both were. We could not easily make a step, either forward or backward, without great hazard of guilt, or at least of dishonour. We were unhappily entangled in connections with men who did not mean so well as ourselves, or did not judge so rightly. If we endeavoured to stop them, they thought us false to the cause: if we went on with them, we run directly upon rocks, which we saw, but could not avoid. Nor could we take shelter in a philosophical retreat from business. Inaction would in us have been cowardice and desertion. To compleat the public calamities, a religious fury, on both sides, mingled itself with the rage of our civil dissensions, more frantic than that, more implacable, more averse to all healing measures. The most intemperate counsels were thought the most *pious*; and a regard to the laws, if they opposed the suggestions of these fiery zealots, was accounted *irreligion*. This added new difficulties to what was before but too difficult in itself, the settling of a nation which no longer could put any confidence in its sovereign, nor lay more restraints on the royal authority without destroying the balance of the whole constitution. In these circumstances, the balls, that pierced our hearts, were directed thither by the hands of our guardian angels, to deliver us from horrors we could not support, and perhaps from a guilt our souls abhorred.

MR. HAMPDEN.

Indeed things were brought to so deplorable a state, that, if either of us had seen his party triumphant, he must have lamented that triumph as the ruin of his country. Were I to return into life, the experience I have had would make me very cautious, how I kindled the sparks of civil war in England: for I have seen, that, when once that devouring fire is lighted,

DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD.

lighted, it is not in the power of the head of a party to say to the conflagration, *Thus far shalt thou go, and here shall thy violence stop.*

LORD FALKLAND.

The conversation we have had, as well as the reflexions of my own mind on past events, would, if I were condemned to my body again, teach me great moderation in my judgments of persons, who might happen to differ from me in difficult scenes of public action: they would entirely cure me of the *spirit of party*, and make me think, that, as in the church, so also in the state, no evil is more to be feared than a rancorous and enthusiastical zeal.

DIALOGUE II.

LOUIS LE GRAND—PETER THE GREAT.

LOUIS.

WHO, Sir, could have thought, when you were learning the trade of a shipwright in the dockyards of England and Holland, that you would ever acquire, as I had done, the surname of Great?

PETER.

Which of us best deserved that title, posterity will decide. But my greatness appeared sufficiently in that very act which seemed to you a debasement.

LOUIS.

The dignity of a king does not stoop to such mean employments. For my own part, I was careful never to appear to the eyes of my subjects or foreigners, but in all the splendor and majesty of royal power.

PETER.