

mysteries of the *bona dea*, was not suffered to be pried into by any but such as were initiated in it's service: because perhaps the exertion of the one, like the solemnities of the other, would not bear the inspection of a rational and sober enquiry. The glorious queen Elizabeth herself made no scruple to direct her parliaments to abstain from discoursing of matters of state^b; and it was the constant language of this favorite princess and her ministers, that even that august assembly "ought not to deal, to judge, or to meddle, with "her majesty's prerogative royal^c." And her successor, king James the first, who had imbibed high notions of the divinity of regal sway, more than once laid it down in his speeches, that "as it is "atheism and blasphemy in a creature to dispute what the deity "may do, so it is presumption and sedition in a subject to dispute "what a king may do in the height of his power: good christians, he adds, will be content with God's will, revealed in his "word; and good subjects will rest in the king's will, revealed "in *his* law^d."

BUT, whatever might be the sentiments of some of our princes, this was never the language of our antient constitution and laws. The limitation of the regal authority was a first and essential principle in all the Gothic systems of government established in Europe; though gradually driven out and overborne, by violence and chicane, in most of the kingdoms on the continent. We have seen, in the preceding chapter, the sentiments of Bracton and Fortescue, at the distance of two centuries from each other. And sir Henry Finch, under Charles the first, after the lapse of two centuries more, though he lays down the law of prerogative in very strong and emphatical terms, yet qualifies it with a general restriction, in regard to the liberties of the people. "The king "hath a prerogative in all things, that are not injurious to the "subject; for in them all it must be remembered, that the king's "prerogative stretcheth not to the doing of any wrong^e." *Nihil*

^b Dewes. 479.

^c *Ibid.* 645.

^d King James's works. 557. 531.

^e Finch. L. 84, 85.