

A LETTER

TO

THE REVEREND MR. FLEURY.

Labour for peace: But when I speak thereof, they make themselves ready for battle. Psalm cxx. 7.

REVEREND SIR,

1. IN JUNE, 1769, I spent two or three days at Waterford. As soon as my back was turned, you valiantly attacked me, I suppose both morning and afternoon. Hearing, when I was there, two or three weeks ago, that you designed me the same favour, I waited upon you at the Cathedral, on Sunday, April 28. You was as good as your word: You drew the sword, and, in effect, threw away the scabbard. You made a furious attack on a large body of people, of whom you knew just nothing. Blind and bold, you laid about you without fear or wit, without any regard either to truth, justice, or mercy. And thus you entertained, both morning and evening, a large congregation who came to hear "the words of eternal life."

2. Not having leisure myself, I desired Mr. Bourke to wait upon you the next morning. He proposed our writing to each other. You said, "No; if anything can be said against my Sermons, I expect it shall be printed: Let it be done in a public, not a private way." I did not desire this; I had much rather it had been done privately. But since you will have it so, I submit.

3. Your text was, "I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." (Acts xx. 29, 30.) Having shown that St. Paul foresaw these false teachers, you undertake to show, (1.) The mischiefs which they occasioned.

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(2.) The character of them, and how nearly this concerns a set of men called Methodists. (*First Sermon*, pp. 1-4.)

4. Against these false teachers, you observe, St. Paul warned the Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, and Hebrews. (Pages 5-8.) Very true; but what is this to the point? O, much more than some are aware of. This insinuation was, all along, just as if you had said, "I beseech you, my dear hearers, mark the titles he gives to these grievous wolves, false apostles, deceitful workers, and apply them to the Methodist Teachers. There I give them a deadly thrust."

5. "These are well styled by Christ, 'ravening wolves;' by St. Paul, 'grievous wolves,' from the mischiefs they do, rending the Church of Christ, and perverting the true sense of the gospel, for their own private ends. They ever did, and to this day do, pretend to extraordinary inspiration." (Page 8.)

Round assertions! Let us consider them one by one: (1.) "These are styled by Christ 'ravening wolves;' by St. Paul, 'grievous wolves.'" True; but how does it appear that these names are applicable to the Methodists? Why, they "rend the Church of Christ." What is the Church of Christ? According to our Article, a Church is "a company of faithful people," of true believers, who have "the mind that was in Christ," and "walk as Christ walked." Who then are the Church of Christ in Waterford? Point them out, Sir, if you know them; and then be pleased to show how the Methodists rend this Church of Christ. You may as justly say they rend the walls or the steeple of the cathedral church. "However, they pervert the true sense of the gospel, for their own private ends." Wherein do they pervert the true sense of the gospel? I have published Notes both on the Gospels and the other Scriptures. But wherein do those Notes pervert the sense? None has yet attempted to show. But for what private ends should I pervert it? For ease or honour? Then I should be sadly disappointed. Or for money? This is the silliest tale of all. You may easily know, if you are willing to know it, that I did not leave Waterford without being some pounds lighter than I was when I came thither.

6. "But they pretend to extraordinary inspiration." They do not: They expressly disclaim it. I have declared an hundred times, I suppose ten times in print, that I pretend to no other inspiration than that which is common to all real Chris-

tians, without which no one can be a Christian at all. "They denounce hell and damnation to all that reject their pretences." (Page 9.) This is another charge; but it is as groundless as the former; it is without all shadow of truth. You may as well say, The Methodists denounce hell and damnation to all that reject Mahometanism. As groundless, as senselessly, shamelessly false, is the assertion following: "To reject their ecstasies and fanatic pretences to revelation is cried up as a crime of the blackest dye." It cannot be, that we should count it a crime to reject what we do not pretend to at all. But I pretend to no ecstasies of any kind, nor to any other kind of revelation than you yourself, yea, and every Christian enjoys, unless he is "without God in the world."

7. "These grievous wolves pretended to greater mortification and self-denial than the Apostles themselves." (Page 11.) This discovery is spick and span new: I never heard of it before. But pray, Sir, where did you find it? I think, not in the canonical Scriptures. I doubt you had it from some apocryphal writer. "Thus also do the modern false teachers." I know not any that do. Indeed I have read of some such among the Mahometan Dervises, and among the Indian Brahmins. But I doubt whether any of these outlandish creatures have been yet imported into Great Britain or Ireland.

8. "They pretend to know the mind of Christ better than his Apostles." (Page 12.) Certainly the Methodists do not: This is another sad mistake, not to say slander. "However, better than their successors do." That is another question. If you rank yourself among their successors, as undoubtedly you do, I will not deny that some of these poor, despised people, though not acting in a public character, do know the mind of Christ, that is, the meaning of the Scripture, better than you do yet. But, perhaps, when ten years more are gone over your head, you may know it as well as they.

9. You conclude this Sermon, "Let us not be led away by those who represent the comfortable religion of Christ as a path covered over with thorns." (Page 14.) This cap does not fit me. I appeal to all that have heard me at Waterford, or elsewhere, whether I represent religion as an uncomfortable thing. No, Sir; both in preaching and writing I represent it as far more comfortable than you do, or are able to do. "But you represent us as lovers of pleasure more than lovers of

God." If any do this, I doubt they touch a sore spot ; I am afraid the shoe pinches. " They affirm pleasure in general to be unlawful, grounding it on, ' They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' " (Page 15.) Wrong, top and bottom. Did we hold the conclusion, we should never infer it from such premises. But we do not hold it : We no more affirm pleasure in general to be unlawful, than eating and drinking. This is another invention of your own brain, which never entered into our thoughts. It is really curious when you add, " This is bringing men ' after the principles of the world, and not after Christ.' " What, the affirming that pleasure is unlawful ? Is this " after the principles of the world ? " Was ever text so unhappily applied ?

10. So much for your first Sermon ; wherein, though you do not seem to want good-will, yet you are marvellously barren of invention ; having only retailed two or three old, threadbare objections, which have been answered twenty times over. You begin the second, " I shall now consider some of their many absurd doctrines : The first of which is, ' the pretending to be divinely inspired.' " (*Second Sermon*, p. 1.) An odd doctrine enough. " And called in an extraordinary manner to preach the word of God." (Pages 2-4.)

This is all harping upon the same string, the grand objection of Lay-Preachers. We have it again and again, ten, twenty times over. I shall answer it once for all. Not by anything new,—that is utterly needless ; but barely by repeating the answer which convinced a serious Clergyman many years ago :—

" TULLAMORE, *May* 4, 1748.

" REVEREND SIR,

" I HAVE at present neither leisure nor inclination to enter into a formal controversy ; but you will give me leave just to offer a few loose hints relating to the subject of our last night's conversation :—

" 1. Seeing life and health are things of so great importance, it is, without question, highly expedient that Physicians should have all possible advantages of learning and education.

" 2. That trial should be made of them by competent judges, before they practise publicly.

" 3. That, after such trial, they be authorized to practise by those who are empowered to convey that authority.

"4. And that, while they are preserving the lives of others, they should have what is sufficient to sustain their own.

"5. But supposing a gentleman bred at the University in Dublin, with all the advantages of education, after he has undergone all the usual trials, and then been regularly authorized to practise :

"6. Suppose, I say, this Physician settles at — for some years, and yet makes no cures at all ; but, after trying his skill on five hundred persons, cannot show that he has healed one ; many of his patients dying under his hands, and the rest remaining just as they were before he came :

"7. Will you condemn a man who, having some little skill in physic, and a tender compassion for those who are sick or dying all around him, cures many of those, without fee or reward, whom the Doctor *could* not cure ?

"8. At least, *did* not, (which is the same thing as to the case in hand,) were it only for this reason,—because he did not go to them, and they would not come to him ?

"9. Will you condemn him because he has not learning, or has not had an University education ?

"What then ? He cures those whom the man of learning and education cannot cure.

"10. Will you object, that he is no Physician, nor has any authority to practise ?

"I cannot come into your opinion. I think, *Medicus est qui medetur* ; ' he is a Physician who heals ; ' and that every man has authority to save the life of a dying man.

"But if you only mean, he has no authority to take fees, I contend not : For he takes none at all.

"11. Nay, and I am afraid it will hold, on the other hand, *Medicus non est qui non medetur* ; I am afraid, if we use propriety of speech, ' he is no Physician who works no cure.'

"12. ' O, but he has taken his degree of Doctor of Physic, and therefore has authority.'

"Authority to do what ? ' Why, to heal all the sick that will employ him.' But (to wave the case of those who will not employ him ; and would you have even their lives thrown away ?) he does not heal those that do employ him. He that was sick before, is sick still ; or else he is gone hence, and is no more seen.

"Therefore his authority is not worth a rush ; for it serves not the end for which it was given.

"13. And surely he has not authority to kill them, by hindering another from saving their lives!

"14. If he either attempts or desires to hinder him, if he condemns or dislikes him for it, it is plain to all thinking men, he regards his own fees more than the lives of his patients.

"II. Now to apply. 1. Seeing life everlasting, and holiness or health of soul, are things of so great importance, it is highly expedient that Ministers, being Physicians of the soul, should have all advantage of education and learning.

"2. That full trial should be made of them in all respects, and that by the most competent judges, before they enter on the public exercise of their office, the saving souls from death:

"3. That, after such trial, they be authorized to exercise that office by those who are empowered to convey that authority. (I believe Bishops are empowered to do this, and have been so from the apostolic age.)

"4. And that those whose souls they save ought, meantime, to provide them what is needful for the body.

"5. But suppose a gentleman bred at the University of Dublin, with all the advantages of education, after he has undergone the usual trials, and been regularly authorized to save souls from death:

"6. Suppose, I say, this Minister settles at — for some years, and yet saves no souls at all; saves no sinners from their sins; but after he has preached all this time to five or six hundred persons, cannot show that he has converted one from the error of his ways; many of his parishioners dying as they lived, and the rest remaining just as they were before he came:

"7. Will you condemn a man who, having compassion on dying souls, and some knowledge of the gospel of Christ, without any temporal reward, saves many from their sins whom the Minister *could* not save?

"8. At least, *did* not: Nor ever was likely to do it; for he did not go to them, and they would not come to him.

"9. Will you condemn such a Preacher, because he has not learning, or has not had an University education?

"What then? He saves those sinners from their sins whom the man of learning and education cannot save.

"A peasant being brought before the College of Physicians at Paris, a learned Doctor accosted him, 'What, friend, do you

pretend to prescribe to people that have agues? Dost thou know what an ague is?’

“He replied, ‘Yes, Sir. An ague is, what I can cure and you cannot.’

“10. Will you object, ‘But he is no Minister, nor has any authority to save souls?’

“I must beg leave to dissent from you in this. I think he is a true evangelical Minister, *Διακονος*, servant of Christ and his Church, who *ουτω διακονει*, ‘so ministers’ as to save souls from death, to reclaim sinners from their sins; and that every Christian, if he is able to do it, has authority to save a dying soul.

“But if you only mean, he has no authority to take tithes, I grant it. He takes none. As he has freely received, so he freely gives.

“11. But, to carry the matter a little farther, I am afraid it will hold, on the other hand, with regard to the soul as well as the body, *Medicus non est qui non medetur*. I am afraid reasonable men will be inclined to think, ‘he that saves no souls is no Minister of Christ.’

“12. ‘O but he is ordained, and therefore has authority.’

“Authority to do what? ‘To save all the souls that will put themselves under his care.’ True; but (to wave the case of them that will not; and would you desire that even those should perish?) he does not, in fact, save them that are under his care: Therefore, what end does his authority serve? He that was a drunkard, is a drunkard still. The same is true of the Sabbath-breaker, the thief, the common swearer. This is the best of the case; for many have died in their iniquity, and their blood will God require at the watchman’s hand.

“13. For surely he has no authority to murder souls; either by his neglect, by his smooth, if not false, doctrine, or by hindering another from plucking them out of the fire and bringing them to life everlasting.

“14. If he either attempts or desires to hinder him, if he condemns or is displeased with him for it, how great reason is there to fear, that he regards his own profit more than the salvation of souls!”

11. “But why do you not prove your mission by miracles?” This likewise you repeat over and over. But I have not leisure to answer the same stale objection an hundred times. I there-

fore give this also the same answer which I gave many years ago:—

12. "What is it you would have us prove by miracles? that the doctrines we preach are true? This is not the way to prove that: We prove the doctrines we preach by Scripture and reason. Is it, (1.) That A. B. was for many years without God in the world, a common swearer, a Sabbath-breaker, a drunkard? Or, (2.) That he is not so now? Or, (3.) That he continued so till he heard us preach, and from that time was another man? Not so; the proper way to prove these facts, is by the testimony of competent witnesses. And these witnesses are ready, whenever required, to give full evidence of them. Or would you have it proved by miracles, (4.) That this was not done by our own power or holiness? that God only is able to raise the dead, those who are dead in trespasses and sins? Nay, 'if you hear not Moses, and the Prophets,' and the Apostles, on this head, neither will you believe 'though one rose from the dead.' It is therefore utterly unreasonable and absurd, to require or expect the proof of miracles, in questions of such a kind as are always decided by proofs of quite another nature." (*Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Vol. VIII. p. 233.)

If you will take the trouble of reading that little Tract, you will find more upon the same head.

13. If you say, "But those who lay claim to extraordinary inspiration and revelation ought to prove that claim by miracles," we allow it: But this is not our case. We lay claim to no such thing. The Apostles did lay claim to extraordinary inspiration, and accordingly proved their claim by miracles. And their blessed Master claimed to be Lord of all, the eternal Son of God. Well therefore might he be expected to "do the works which no other man did;" especially as he came to put an end to that dispensation which all men knew to be of God. See then how idly and impertinently you require the Methodists to work miracles "because Christ and his Apostles did!"

14. You proceed: "They pretend to be as free from sin as Jesus Christ." (Page 6.) You bring three proofs of this: (1.) "Mr. Wesley, in his answer to a Divine of our Church, says, 'Jesus Christ stands as our regeneration, to help us to the same holy undefiled nature which he himself had. And if this very life and identical nature is not propagated and derived on us, he is not our Saviour.'" (Page 7.) When I heard you read

these words, I listened and studied, and could not imagine where you got them. I knew they were not mine: I use no such queer language; but did not then recollect, that they are Mr. Law's words, in his answer to Dr. Trapp, an extract from which I have published. But be they whose they will, they by no means imply that we are to be "as righteous as Christ was," but that we are to be (which St. Peter likewise affirms) "partakers of the Divine nature." (2.) "A Preacher of yours declared he was as free from sin as Christ ever was." I did not hear him declare it: Pray did you? If not, how do you know he declared it at all? Nay, but "another declared he believed it was impossible for one whom he named to sin, for the Spirit of God dwelt in him bodily." (Page 8.) Pray, Sir, did you hear this yourself? Else the testimony is nothing worth. Hearsay evidence will not be admitted by any Court in the kingdom.

What you say of that good man Mr. Whitefield, now with God, I leave with Mr. H—'s remark: "I admire your prudence, though not your generosity; for it is much safer to cudgel a dead man than a living one."

15. You next descant upon "the disorders which the spirit of enthusiasm created in the last age." Very likely it might; but, blessed be God, that is nothing at all to us. For he hath given us, not the spirit of enthusiasm, but of love and of a sound mind. In the following page you quaintly compare your hearers to sheep, and yourself and friends to the dogs in the fable; and seem much afraid, lest the silly sheep should be "persuaded to give you up to these ravening wolves." Nay, should you not rather be ranked with the sheep than the dogs? For your teeth are not so sharp as razors.

16. "Another fundamental error of the Methodists is, the asserting that laymen may preach; yea, the most ignorant and illiterate of them, provided they have the inward call of the Spirit." (Page 11.)

The former part of this objection we had before. The latter is a total mistake. They do not allow the "most ignorant" men to preach, whatever "inward call" they pretend to. Among them none are allowed to be stated Preachers, but such as, (1.) Are truly alive to God; such as experience the "faith that worketh by love;" such as love God and all mankind. (2.) Such as have a competent knowledge of the word of God, and of the work of God in the souls of men. (3.) Such

as have given proof that they are called of God, by converting sinners from the error of their ways. And to show whether they have these qualifications or no, they are a year, sometimes more, upon trial. Now, I pray, what is the common examination, either for Deacon's or Priest's Orders, to this?

17. "But no ambassador can act without a commission from his King: Consequently, no Preacher without a commission from God." (Page 11.) This is a tender point; but you constrain me to speak. I ask then, Is he commissioned from God to preach the gospel, who does not know the gospel? who knows little more of the Bible than of the Koran? I fear not. But if so, what are many of our brethren? Sent of man, but not of God!

"However, these laymen are not sent of God to preach; for does not St. Paul say, 'No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron?'" (Page 13.) Another text most unhappily applied; for Aaron did not preach at all. But if these men are not sent of God, how comes God to confirm their word, by convincing and converting sinners? He confirms the word of his messenger, but of none else. Therefore, if God owns their word, it is plain that God has sent them.

"But the earth opened and swallowed up those intruders into the priestly office, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." (Page 14.) Such an intruder are you, if you convert no sinners to God. Take heed lest a deeper pit swallow *you* up!

18. "But the Church of Rome has sent out Preachers among us, such as Thomas Heath, a Jesuit; and Faithful Commin, a Dominican Friar." (Pages 16, 17.) And what do you infer from hence? that my brother, who was thought a Student of Christ Church in Oxford, was really a Jesuit? and that while I passed for a Fellow of Lincoln College, I was in fact a Dominican Friar? Even to hint at such absurdities as these is an insult on common sense.

19. We have now done with the argumentative part of your Sermons, and come to the exhortation: "Mark them that cause divisions and offences among you; for they serve not the Lord, but their own bellies." (Page 18.) Who "serve their own bellies?" the Methodists, or——? Alas, how terribly might this be retorted! "And by fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." Deceive them into what? into the knowledge and love of God! the loving their neighbour as themselves! the

walking in justice, mercy, and truth! the doing to all as they would be done to! *Felices errore suo!** Would to God all the people of Waterford, rich and poor, yea, all the men, women, and children in the three kingdoms, may be thus deceived!

20. "Do not credit those who tell you that we must judge of our regeneration by sensible impulses, impressions, ardors, and ecstasies." (Page 19.) Who tells them so? Not I: Not Mr. Bourke: Not any in connexion with me. Sir, you yourself either do or ought to know the contrary. Whether therefore these are, or are not, "signs of the Spirit," (page 20,) see you to it; it is nothing to me; any more than whether the Spirit does or does not "show itself in groanings and sighings, in fits and starts." I never affirmed it did: And when you represent me as so doing, you are a sinner against God, and me, and your own soul.

21. If you should see good to write anything more about the Methodists, I beg you would first learn who and what they are. Be so kind as at least to read over my "Journals," and the "Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion." Then you will no longer "run" thus "uncertainly," or "fight as one that beateth the air." But I would rather hope you will not fight at all. For, whom would you fight with? If you will fight, it must be with your friends; for such we really are. We wish all the same happiness to you which we wish to our own souls. We desire no worse for you, than that you may "present" yourself "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God;" that you may watch over the souls committed to your charge, as he "that must give account;" and that, in the end, you may receive "the crown which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to all that love his appearing!" So prays,

Reverend Sir,

Your affectionate Brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

LIMERICK,

May 18, 1771.

* Happy in their error.—EDIT.