

LETTER

FROM

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD GRENVILLE,

TO THE

EARL OF FINGALL.

London :

PRINTED FOR JOHN STOCKDALE, PICCADILLY.

1810.

LETTER

THE RIGHT HONORABLE

LORD ALBERT

EARL OF ALBANY

London:

J. BRETTELL and Co. Printers,
Marshall-Street, Golden-Square, London.

1810

Houses of the Oireachtas

Camelford House,
January 22d, 1810.

MY LORD,

I HAVE the honour to address this Letter to your Lordship, in reply to that which I received from you, respecting the Petition with which you are charged. This form of communication I consider as most satisfactory to your Lordship. It is also best calculated to do justice to the sentiments of some of the most distinguished Advocates of your Cause, in concurrence with whom my decision has been taken.

I must, in the first place, assure your Lordship, that my opinion remains unchanged as to the object of your Petition. It would, I think, be an act of undeniable wisdom and justice to communicate to our fellow-subjects professing the Roman Catholic Religion, the

full enjoyment of our Civil Constitution. Such a measure, accompanied by suitable arrangements maturely prepared; and deliberately adopted, would, I am confident, above all others, give strength and unity to the Empire, and increased security to its Religious and Civil Establishments. Your Lordship is well aware, that on this conviction only have I supported it. To those Establishments I am unalterably attached; their inviolable maintenance I have ever considered as essential to all the dearest interests of my Country. But they rest, I am certain, on foundations much too firm; they are far too deeply rooted in the affections of that community to which they dispense the blessings of Religion, Order, and Liberty, to require the adventitious and dangerous support of partial restrictions, fruitful in discontent, but for security wholly inefficient.

With respect to the present application to Parliament, I knew not, except from public report, that such a measure was in contemplation; or that it was the wish of the Petitioners to place their Petition in my hands.

I have twice already, at the request of the Catholics of Ireland, moved the House of Lords to take the subject into consideration. I did not in either case think myself responsible for your determination as to the time of agitating the question: a determination which in the first instance I had not suggested, and which in the last I had in my place in Parliament publicly dissuaded: but recent events had in both cases imposed upon me a peculiar duty, not merely for my own Honour, but in justice also to your cause, to prove by my conduct, on the earliest occasion afforded by yourselves, that no change of public situation, no prejudice, no calumny, no clamour, could either vary or suppress my opinions on this great national question. This duty has, I trust, been fully satisfied. Deeply impressed with the importance of the measures which I recommended, I have spared no sacrifice, omitted no exertion by which I could contribute to their accomplishment; and if I could now deceive myself with the hope that a renewal of my weak efforts in the present moment

could expedite or facilitate their ultimate success, it would be my highest gratification once more to stand forward as the chosen Advocate of National Conciliation.

Circumstanced as this question now is, both in England and in Ireland, it is on the contrary my deliberate opinion that no Motion grounded on your Petition could at this time, in any hands, certainly not in mine, be brought forward without great and permanent disadvantage to its object.

This opinion is founded, not only on the present known dispositions of Government and Parliament, but also on the unexpected difficulties which have arisen in Ireland, on the impressions which they may too probably create, and on the embarrassments which they unavoidably produce.

It would be an invidious task for me to recapitulate in this place, the transactions of the last three years, or to describe the spirit and temper, the language and the conduct of His Majesty's Ministers towards your Body; nor would it become me to censure, though I may

be permitted to lament, the decisions of the Legislature.

To these two topics it is sufficient briefly to have adverted. The obstacles which in the present moment they oppose to any favourable consideration of your Cause, and the advantages which they afford to the misrepresentations of your adversaries, are too obvious to require explanation.

Many circumstances compel me to speak to your Lordship more at large of the recent proceedings in Ireland ; with reference both to their origin and to their consequences. For this purpose I must beg leave to recall to your Lordship's recollection the grounds on which the consideration of these Petitions has uniformly been recommended to Parliament. That which you have asked, and which has been supported by the greatest Statesmen of our time, now no more, is not in its nature a single or unconnected measure. Its objects are, the Peace and Happiness of Ireland, and the Union of the Empire in Affection as well as in Government. Vain indeed would be the hope of accom-

plishing such purposes, solely by the repeal of a few partial disqualifications, remaining by a strange anomaly amidst the ruins of a whole Code of Proscription. To impute to you this visionary pretension, has been the artifice of your Opponents. The views of your Friends have been more enlarged.

With the just and salutary extension of Civil Rights to your Body must be combined, if tranquillity and union be our object, other extensive and complicated arrangements. All due provision must be made for the inviolable maintenance of the Religious and Civil Establishments of this United Kingdom: Much must be done for mutual conciliation, much for common safety, many contending interests must be reconciled, many jealousies allayed, many long cherished and mutually destructive prejudices eradicated.

Such at least has always been my own declared opinions. When this matter was last under the consideration of Parliament, I had occasion to dwell with particular earnestness on this necessity; I invited the suggestions of

others for providing for it ; and I enumerated several measures which eight years before had been in the contemplation of the Government of which I then formed a part, and in conjunction with which I had cherished the vain hope of rendering this great service to my Country.

Among these measures I pointed out, the proposal of vesting in the Crown an effectual negative on the appointment of your Bishops. That suggestion had previously been brought forward in the House of Commons, to meet the just expectations, not of any bigotted or interested champions of intolerance, but of men of the purest intentions and most enlightened judgment, — men willing to do all justice to the loyalty of your present Bishops, but not unreasonably alarmed at any possibility by which functions of such extensive influence might hereafter be connected with a foreign interest hostile to the tranquillity of your country : A danger recently very much increased by the captivity and deposal of the Head of your Church, by the seizure of his dominions, and by the declared intention of that hostile government to assume

in future the exclusive nomination of his successors. The suggestion thus opened to Parliament, produced there impressions highly favourable to your cause ; it was received as the surest indication of those dispositions without which all concession must be nugatory, and all conciliation hopeless. To my mind it had been recommended by long reflection. It had formed a part of the original conception of those measures as consequent upon the Union. It was now again brought forward with the concurrence of the two Individuals from whose opinions those generally prevalent among your Body might best be inferred ; of the Agent of the very Persons to whose office it related ; and of your Lordship, to whom, in addition to every other claim to respect and confidence, the exclusive charge of the Petition had recently been committed. What I said on the subject, in the House of Lords, was spoken in the hearing of both, and I received from both, while the impression was yet recent on your minds, the most gratifying acknowledgments of your satisfaction in all that I had stated.

It was never, I believe, imagined by any of us, that what then passed could be binding on the opinions of the Petitioners. The Roman Catholics of Ireland are not a Corporate Body. They speak through no common organ. Their various wishes and interests, like those of their fellow-subjects, can be collected only from general information ; and any opinions erroneously attributed to them, they, like all other persons, are fully entitled to disclaim.

I learnt, however, with deep and heart-felt regret, the subsequent proceedings which took place in Ireland, in consequence of this suggestion. To discuss the grounds of those proceedings would be foreign from my present purpose. Their effect obviously must be not only to revive expiring prejudices, but to clog with fresh embarrassment every future discussion of any of the measures connected with your Petitions. To myself unquestionably the difficulty of originating at this time any fresh discussion respecting those measures, does, in such circumstances, appear almost insuperable.

Let me not, however, be misunderstood.

When I speak of the necessity of combining with the accomplishment of your wishes, provisions of just security to others, I am no less desirous of consulting every reasonable apprehension on your part.

To the forms indeed of those securities I attach comparatively little importance. A pertinacious adherence to such details, in opposition even to groundless prejudice, I consider as the reverse of Legislative Wisdom. I look only to their substantial purposes; the safety of our own establishments, the mutual good will of all our fellow-subjects, and the harmony of the United Kingdom.

That adequate arrangements may be made for all these purposes, consistently with the strictest adherence on your part to your own Religious Tenets, is the persuasion which you have long been labouring to establish, and of which I have uniformly professed my own conviction.

Were it otherwise, I should indeed despair. But that these objects may be reconciled, in so far at least as respects the appointment of your

Bishops, is known with undeniable certainty. It is proved by the acquiescence of your Church in similar arrangements under other Governments, by the sentiments which many of yourselves still entertain as to the proposal suggested in 1808, and most of all by the express consent formerly given to that proposal by the most considerable of your own Bishops.

I see, therefore, in the present state of this subject, much unexpected embarrassment, and many difficulties which renewed discussion, in the present moment, must, instead of smoothing, inevitably aggravate. There is however no ground for ultimate discouragement. The sentiment of reciprocal confidence, the spirit of mutual conciliation would surmount far greater obstacles.

But nothing, permit me to remark it, can in the mean time be more injurious to your cause than any attempt by partial and precipitate decisions to prejudge its separate branches, or to limit its unreserved discussion. No course can be more grateful to your Opponents, none more embarrassing to your Supporters.

To Parliament, when any more favourable conjuncture for this discussion shall arise, every information may properly be supplied, every wish imparted, every apprehension communicated. There only, by a systematic and comprehensive arrangement, can all the various difficulties be surmounted, which on every side embarrass this extensive subject. To be effective and permanent, such an arrangement must be mutually satisfactory.

This is alike the interest of every Member of the British Empire, but to none more important than to the Catholics of Ireland. The stability of all your Civil Rights, both of those which you already enjoy, and of those to which you seek to be admitted, essentially depends on the tranquillity and harmony of your Country, on banishing from it every hostile influence, and composing all its internal differences.

These opinions I have expressed to your Lordship with the freedom of a tried and zealous Advocate of your cause. On these grounds alone have I ever attempted to do justice to it. To have argued it on any other

would have been a dereliction of my own principles.

I need hardly add, that by the same principles my present conduct must equally continue to be directed. Should the Petitioners continue to entertain the desire conveyed in your Lordship's letter, that I should lay this Petition upon the Table of the House of Lords; with that request I cannot hesitate to comply. It would be highly improper to deny to such a Body of Men the opportunity of submitting, through my hands, if they should so desire it, and at their own time, their wishes to the Legislature of their Country. It would be still more inexcusable in a case where all my opinions and all my wishes are favourable to the object of their application. On the measure itself, if any motion respecting it be originated by others, I shall not fail to urge with unabated earnestness all the same sentiments which I have detailed in this letter. But I must with equal explicitness decline to be myself, at this time, and under so many circumstances of such peculiar disadvantage to your cause, the Mover of any

such Proposition. I am satisfied, that by this decision I shall best promote the ultimate success of that great work which I have long laboured to accomplish. My reasons for this persuasion I have, I trust, sufficiently explained. They may be erroneous, they are at least sincere.

To the principle of equal Laws, to the object of National Conciliation, I am invariably attached. By me, they shall never be abandoned. But any personal exertions which I can make for purposes of such inestimate benefit to my Country must ever be regulated by that discretion, which I am equally determined in every situation to reserve unfettered by previous engagements, and the faithful exercise of which my Public Duty imperatively forbids me to relinquish.

I have the honour to be,

&c. &c. &c.

(Signed) GREVILLE.

Earl of Fingall.

