

FIRST LETTER.

A

LETTER

FROM

EARL FITZWILLIAM,

RECENTLY RETIRED FROM THIS COUNTRY,

TO THE

Earl of Carlisle:

EXPLAINING THE CAUSES OF THAT EVENT.

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1795.

Houses of the Oireachtas

THE FIRST
LETTER,

&c. &c.

DEAR CARLISLE,

I THANK you for your letter, and for the motives that induced you to write it: I know the warmth and truth of your friendship for me; and feel the sincerity of it, when you apprise me of all the calumnies, all the aspersions, all the false charges and insinuations that are levelled against my devoted head: but, standing as I find I do, single, naked, and unsupported, I tremble not:—I

am not dismayed, I feel the inward conscientiousness that, against whatever part of my conduct, whether as to measures or arrangements, the attack is principally to be levelled, I am able to defend its justice, wisdom, and propriety. As yet, my dear Carlisle, but one side of the question has been heard :---It has been heard only through the medium of Insinuations and suspicions :---through that of calumny and aspersion ; under the mask of pretended regret, and of friendly concern for me and my character. Perhaps you yourself may have received your information, and taken your opinions from the very persons who have grossly betrayed, and unfeelingly abandoned me ; whose counsels, maxims, and measures, I have been pursuing ; and for having pursued, I am now given up to every sort of obloquy, and every extent of disgrace.

You tell me, you have heard of the list of my dismissals with surprise and dismay. I long to know what dismissals they are, that have produced this wonderful effect. Its insinuations that are levelled against my beloved head : but, standing as I find I do, single, naked, and unsupported, I tremble not :—

I removed two clerks from office, placed in situations that required a certain degree of confidence, but perfectly subordinate, and of no offensibility; it might be sufficient for me to say, that neither I nor my chief Secretary, with whom they were in hourly intercourse, felt inclined to give them that confidence; or to suffer the business of their respective offices to be conducted on the system which we found had been lately introduced there.

In your days, they were clerks, in mine I found them ministers. Other governments might have been managed upon such a system; mine could not. One of my objects, and that a principal one, was to bring back consequence and dignity to English government, and restore the castle its proper ministers; to have, in every subordinate office, persons content to manage it as such; and to shew that the government, as well in its patronage, as in all its various official details, was in no other hands but mine and Lord M—n's. Whether I left these persons the pens and ink of their office, with their usual salaries, or removing

removing them, made compensation adequate to their services and pretensions, can never appear to me matter of such magnitude, as to spread dismay through the British cabinet. In this light it is really too ridiculous.—But to take care of them was an act not only of propriety, but of justice. The thanks of ^xone of them conveyed in writing, and expressed in personal conference with myself, within these two days, justify my intention to him. Mr. Cooke indeed, whose tone and style rendered his approach to a superior not to be supported, rejects my proposals in his favour, and thinks a retreat upon £.1200 a year an inadequate recompence for the magnitude and importance of his services.

I made proposals to the B^{riti}sh M^{iniste}r for the removal of the ^xA^{ttorne}y and S^{ecre}tary G^{en}erals: are these proposals, and with the terms and stipulations on which I suggested the adoption of them, among the causes that has spread this consternation? Mr. Pitt and the Duke of Portland know perfectly well, that the men whom I found possessed of these ministerial offices, were not the men in whom I meant

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Mr Sackville
Hamilton

Wolfe
&
Zolner

meant to confide, in the arduous measures I had to undertake. Was I then to have two sets of men, one possessing confidence without office, the other office without confidence? The absurdity must strike you and every body; and the delay of perfecting in England, the arrangements I proposed, in order to avoid the absurdity, exposed Lord M——n to a situation perfectly awkward, and which might have been highly embarrassing. But I can take my ground on the fact itself, independent of every other consideration: without meaning to depreciate the character of those gentlemen still in those offices, with respect to their professional merits, indisputably they were not men of parliamentary abilities: and you know it is principally upon the persons in those offices that G^{overnment} relies both for the defence and the display of their measures. I had a right, therefore, to look for parliamentary abilities in the persons who filled those offices, and were to sit upon the Treasury Bench; in them I did not find that qualification; in Mr. P——y I found it in an eminent degree, his appointment the D—— of P——d at all times considered as a thing

*This was
George
Ponsonby*

thing to be done: it was, then, a situation which
 always designed him, as that for which he
 was most peculiarly qualified, as well by his
 professional knowledge and talents, as by his
 parliamentary eloquence, and it was the only
 one in which he could serve me confidentially
 and ostensibly: that he should do so was as
 much the D— of P—'s recommendation
 as it was my desire. If it had not been so,
 why did the D— of P— desire me to
 send for him to England, to consult upon the
 arrangement and plan of my G—t? why
 did Mr. P— admit him to consultations
 upon our arrangements to measures? The
 only objections that I ever remembered Mr.
 P— to have suggested, was, that he wished
 him first to be S—r G—l, in order that
 he might not jump at once into the
 elevated station of A—y G—l, but
 rise by a regular gradation; but I never
 once concurred in this objection, because I
 knew Mr. P—y had always fairly stated
 both to the D—e of P— and to me, that
 he had another person in view for S—r
 G—l, to whom he and all his political
 connections were under an absolute engage-
 ment

ment—the only one to which they were pledged. The great question then was, to make an easy and honorable retreat for the person who actually possessed the office of A——y G——l: that retreat was secured to him in the full meaning and intent of these expressions; unless it can be said, that a reversion for himself and his son of £.2300 per annum, (and that daily augmenting) a peerage for his family, and an assurance on my part, that although removed from the immediate pretensions of his office, he still remained the person in my contemplation to fill the first vacancy of a Chief's seat on the Bench, was not an easy and honorable retreat, “but a punishment for sins not committed against my administration.”

With respect to the S——r G——l: considering his pretensions, I conceive, that, had my proposals been carried into effect, I should have done equally well by him. The world thinks so, and judging from his manner towards Lord M. and me, I have every reason to believe that he joins in the common opinion.

B And

And now for the grand question about Mr. Beresford. In a letter of mine to Mr. P—t on this subject, I reminded him of a conversation, in which I had expressed to him (in answer to the question put to him by me) my apprehensions, that it would be necessary to remove that gentleman, and that he did not offer the slightest objection, or say a single word in favour of Mr. Beresford. This alone would have made me suppose, that I should be exempt from every imputation of breach of agreement, if I determined to remove him; but when, on my arrival here, I found all those apprehensions of his dangerous power, which Mr. P—t admits I had often represented to him, were fully justified; when he was filling a situation greater than that of the Lrd L———t, and when I clearly saw, that if I had connected myself with him, it would have been connecting myself with a person under universal heavy suspicions, and subjecting my government to all the opprobrium and unpopularity attendant upon his mal-ad———n. What was then to be my choice—what the decision I had to form? I could not hesitate a moment:—I decided at once, not to cloud the dawn of my
a———n

a——n, by leaving in such power and authority, so much imputed malversation : but in doing this, I determined, while I meant to curtail him of his power, and to shew to the nation that he did not belong to my a——n, to let him remain in point of income, as well, to the full, as he had ever been; I did not touch, and he knew I had determined not to touch, a hair of the head of any one of his family or friends ; and they are still left in the full enjoyment of more emolument than ever was accumulated in any country upon any one family. To the odium of doing so I submitted, rather than incur the risque of displeasing my colleagues, by infringing the emolument of a person professing great attachment to them ; though indeed, at the same time, I had no slight ground of doubting the sincerity of those professions. This, then, is the list of my dismissions ; by these I have punished sins not committed against me ; and by these I have drawn down upon my head the censure of my Sovereign, even at the risque of the peace of this kingdom, and have deserved to be abandoned by those, in whom I most trusted, and to whose support I had every right that the most sincere affection

affection, the most implicit confidence, unbounded reliance, and invariable attachment could give, to depend on. But one more short word on this part of the subject—the dismissals. When were those dismissals made, and when announced to the British Cabinet?—Before the meeting of Parliament. When did their criminality, and the enormity of their offence, first commence?—It was when, under the credit of my administration, perhaps derived from those very causes, the Parliament had submitted to unparalleled burdens, not solely for the purpose of providing for the internal security of this kingdom, by the most ample and formidable military establishments, but likewise by lending its assistance to the empire at large, in the hour of its greatest distress, by aids great and munificent beyond all example; then commenced the breach of all faith and agreement on my part;—then, and not till then, did these dismissals assume the character of “heinous unpardonable criminality;”—then did my administration become mischievous and ruinous to this kingdom, dangerous to his Majesty’s service, and subversive of

of the supremacy of English government in Ireland.

But it appears that not only my arrangements, but my measures also, have created the most universal surprise and dismay. "Persons, it seems, the most connected with me, have precipitately opened measures, which cannot be contemplated without terror;" and all this I have permitted to be done, "before I had time to judge with my own understanding." Am I then, that light, weak, and easy man, that in matters of the highest import to the service, with which I have been entrusted, I should have abandoned my judgment, and committed my decisions to others, without consulting my own understanding? If so, it were much to be wished that the discovery had been made before last July;—before I had been compelled by incessant sollicitations, and the most urgent importunities, to undertake the arduous task for which I and mine have relinquished all our comforts. Egregiously must you have been misled, my dear Carlisle, if such has been the light in which my proceedings on the Catholic question have been represented to you;

my correspondence with the Secretary of S—e for this department will give you very different impressions; and, as my friend, I desire you will apply to see it. I will not enter with you into the policy of this great question, as I have referred you to a correspondence, where, I trust, you will find the reasons on which I grounded the measures which I proposed to be adopted in the progress of it. The chief cause of discontent with me on this head, you represent to be—the precipitancy with which those measures were opened; and to that I shall confine myself in answer to it.

You will recollect that the measure of emancipation to the Catholics was originally the measure of Mr. P—t, and the W———d administration. The most strenuous and zealous friends of my predecessor claimed the credit of it for their patron, in terms of the highest compliment: They did it in the House of C——s; they did it in the House of L—ds last night. The persons whom Lord W———d then principally consulted, opposed it; but the open interference of Lord H——t, and the avowed determination of the British

British Cabinet, communicated as well to the Catholic agents on the spot, as through the medium of confidential persons sent over to England for that purpose, bore down their opposition. The declarations both of Mr. P—t and Mr. D——s on the occasion, are well known in this country, and are often quoted: —“They would not risque a rebellion in Ireland on such a question.” But what they would not risque under Lord W———d’s administration, they are not afraid to risque under mine, when the jealousy and alarm, which certainly at the first period, pervaded the minds of the Protestant body, exist no longer; when not one Protestant corporation, scarcely an individual, has come forward to deprecate and oppose the indulgence claimed by the higher orders of Catholics; when even some of those who were most alarmed in 1793, and were then the most violent opposers, declare the indulgences now asked, to be only the necessary consequences of those granted at that time, and positively essential to secure the well-being of the two countries.

But

But after all, why did not Mr. P—t warn me of those horrid consequences, previous to my departure for Ireland, if he really felt them? Why was the subject left open for my judgment and discretion? It was because he himself approved the principle, and he knew that I would not have undertaken the mission, unless I had been left so unrestrained. How then stands the question? Doubtless if I had not found on my arrival, that the subject was in actual agitation, and that there was a certainty of its being brought immediately forward before Parliament, I should not at this critical moment have stirred it. There was a possibility that it might provoke some Protestant discontent, and this I conceived to be a circumstance that ought most cautiously to be avoided, provided the considerations, that had been discussed between my colleagues and me in England, did not appear to me to outweigh it.

The points then to be considered are these: If the *general principle* of conceding to the Catholics was only taken up by me on my arrival here, without previous agreement on the part of the B—th Ministers, and without my

my having reason to expect their subsequent concurrence :—if the only point reserved for consideration was----the time and manner of bringing forward the measure, and if it was not implicitly left to my discretion to judge of that manner and time : if I did not take every proper precaution to exercise that discretion, and to obtain information by every means within my reach :---if I yielded to the necessity of giving way to the measure, before I had thoroughly examined the practicability and policy of putting it off :---if these things are so, then I stand convicted :---then I must be content to have laid at my door the ferment and distraction which resistance to the Catholic pretensions and my recal from the Government have raised.---But if the converse of this be true, then the verdict must be given in my favor ; and to the events that may hereafter confirm that verdict, I too look forward with as much terror and dismay as you or any person whatever ;---perhaps with more, because I am at hand to see how great and imminent the danger is :---but perhaps it will be better to state the transaction. I arrived here with the recommendations of the B----th Cabinet,

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and the point committed by them to my decision, strongly impressed upon my mind ; I had conversations with most respectable persons upon this important subject, and at first I entertained hopes that the question might lie dormant for the present session, as my first letters will evince ; but a few days shewed me, that these hopes would prove nugatory. I found that the matter was already on foot, and I have the best grounds for believing that on the day of the D-- of P-----'s kissing hands, it was determined to bring it forward this session. All the old friends with whom he had acted, when he was here as Lord L-----t, and whom it was concluded he would again call to his councils, on taking to himself the government, of which there was at that time a general expectation, were known, from their public declarations, and from their proceedings in parliament, to intend a full and complete emancipation ; his own opinions were universally believed to coincide with his Irish friends ; as, to my knowledge, they certainly did.--- Immediately measures were therefore taken by the Catholics, preparatory to the expected change of a-----n here ; and by the
time

time of my arrival, the petitions which have been since laid before the House of Commons, were in complete readiness. When I had fully satisfied myself by every information that I could gain, that this was the real state of the affair; and when I found that any attempt of mine to stop it for the present would be useless; it gave me great satisfaction to find that the business had been put into the hands of my friend Mr. Grattan, by the Catholics, as it gave me an opportunity of knowing every thing that was intended, and of consulting upon it with the C——t in London, previous to its being publicly known. When once the Catholics had positively decided to bring forward this question, even if I had not had previous consultation with my colleagues on the business, under such circumstances I should have thought it right and expedient to gain credit and strength to the administration, by yielding to the general wish; but the fact is, that while I was following my own opinions and inclinations, I was following their directions; and I strictly complied with them; when finding that the general disposition was not to be resisted, I

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resolved

resolved to give the measure a handsome and cordial support on the part of government. The happy effects of this determination I fully experienced. You have been told, I perceive, that the bill was brought in precipitately: this is not the fact. Leave to bring in the bill has certainly been moved for by Mr. G——n, but not a line of the bill itself ever produced. There appeared a rising impatience among the Catholics after the delivery of their petitions, which made me apprehend that the measure might be transferred from the hands of Mr. G——n to those of another, with whom I might have no connection, and consequently over whom I could have no hopes of controul, or to have communication, however much I might wish it. There was no want of candidates for this honor; there were enough greedy to seize upon it. I therefore desired Mr. G. to take possession of the business, that I might be sure of myself having controul over the management of the bill. By this means the plan and extent of the measure is now known only to the B——sh C——t, to whom I have submitted it; and it remains a profound secret to every Roman Catholic, and to every Protestant,

Protestant, except to the very few of the latter description, to whom I have thought proper to confide it. Of these the Primate was the first; and Ministers are already possessed of his opinions on the subject: they are equally in possession of every information respecting men's minds and tempers, which I am able to give: with respect to the merits of the case, abstracted from the local circumstances, surely it would be presumption in me to pretend to dictate to them; I have represented clearly and distinctly my own opinions, but they are capable of deciding and judging for themselves: in the way I have managed they have an opportunity of doing it before the bill is introduced; so that if they do not agree with Mr. Grattan's, (in which I heartily concur) and if they do not come up to the extent claimed and expected by the Catholics, they have had time previous to the introduction of the bill, to suggest any expedients, modifications, or limitations, they may think proper to introduce: thus by my management, g——t will do this without incurring the odium of narrowing an original proposition, and defeating hopes once realized.

Thus,

Thus, then, I made myself master, as well of the time of bringing the measure forward, as for consulting on the points to be conceded : for, as to resisting altogether, I should have belied my own conviction, and betrayed my situation, if I did not represent, as I have repeatedly done, that it would not only defeat every hope I had formed for the general security and defence of the country, but be attended with a certainty of the most alarming and fatal consequences. Of this, as I have already observed to you, every day presented me with additional, indisputable proofs. The alarm that has been universally spread by the rumour of the measures being to be resisted, the language of every person with whom I converse, even of the boldest of its former opposers, the Resolutions and Addresses from the City, echoed already from the Cities of Cork, Londonderry, and the County of Kildare ; and actually adopted through every part of the kingdom, the debates of these last days in the House of C—s ; all these must prove to you that my representations were at least nothing short of the truth. I trust that the evil genius of England will not
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so far infatuate its ministers, as to induce them
 to wait for more decisive corroborations of the
 faithfulness and honesty with which I have
 warned them of the danger of persisting in
 their fatal change of opinion on this momentous
 question : I trust they will perceive, before it
 be too late, that the measures which I thought
 it my duty to suggest, are the only measures
 that can secure the good understanding be-
 tween the two countries ; which, as you may
 observe, it was our plan to obtain by the best
 means we could ; and without which, the most
 serious calamities may arise to both nations.---
 The prospect of having this plan defeated
 may, and will plunge you, and every well-
 wisher to his country, in that " affliction and
 " consternation in which," you say, " you are
 " lost." But let those be answerable, to whose
 counsels alone that misfortune must be attri-
 buted ;---to those who, though rashly and pre-
 cipitately taking their opinions from secret,
 unavowed, insidious informations, and in di-
 rect and open contempt of the official commu-
 nications of the person intrusted by his Majesty
 with the government of this kingdom, in the
 very midst of a critical session of p-----t,
 and

and while the measures were yet pending, which were to provide for the safety, and, perhaps, for the very existence of the country, formed the desperate resolution to change the whole of their system, on a question which, they knew and admit, would involve in its decision—that safety and that existence; and then, while in fact the whole proceeding is to be traced to the M——, who, imposing on his colleagues, risks all, rather than not extend his protection to those whom he considers as his exclusive friends, screen themselves by endeavouring to throw on me the censure of having “changed the decided points on which I had taken my decision to embark, and of having been hurried into the adoption of measures here, which could not have had the previous approbation of M——s in England, or subsequently obtained their concurrence.” You have already seen how false and how groundless that accusation is with respect to the Catholic question. It is equally so in every other respect. The measure of arranging the T——y Bench, the bare outline, or rather the principle, of which has been stated in the House, preparatory to its

its introduction, was fully agreed on between Sir J—n P——l and Mr. P—. Nothing was left unfettled but the detail, and this would have been submitted to the British Cabinet, as the detail of the Catholic business has been submitted to them, previous to its discussion in the House. These are the only measures I have attempted in Parliament, except the supplies, and the defence of the country. Are these the measures on which I am to be accused? Am I to expect to be arraigned, from a general opinion—that I had not obtained the previous concurrence of Ministers? when on the faith of my Government, the reputations of the persons whom I had called to my councils, and principally because I was known to stand unconnected with those for whom my Government is now subverted; the House of Commons of Ireland had unanimously granted me the largest supplies that have ever been demanded. When I had procured an army, infinitely superior in numbers to whatever had been voted before in this kingdom—when I laid a foundation for increasing the established force of the country, and procured a vote of two hundred thousand pounds towards the

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general

general defence of the empire; will my friends inquire why, in all the correspondence of the British Ministry, I have never received a line to express the least satisfaction, the least approbation of these my successful exertions in his Majesty's service? Why, to the eve of my recal, they never deigned even to notice, or to give a word of answer, while I repeatedly called for instructions how I should proceed, in giving these measures their best effect towards the general service? and why, at the very moment when I was going on with the united confidence and support of Parliament and People, in rapidly promoting internal tranquillity, and successfully providing for foreign defence, the Ministry of England, instead of co-operating with my zeal, or forwarding my intentions, were through one channel caviling with me on petty arrangements, and the jobs of intriguing individuals; and through another (the channel of my friends) abandoning and betraying me?

You express an earnest wish that I may yet be able to reside: I certainly cannot. But I am
certainly

certainly prepared to meet, confute, and retort that criminating opinion, however general you may represent it to be on your side of the water, that I and my advisers have been hasty and precipitate. There is indeed another opinion, which you say is equally general, that I shall be most anxious to confirm. Whatever it may cost my feelings, I shall not forget the duty I owe to his Majesty, or neglect the trust he has been graciously pleased to repose in me: a sense of my own honor, and what I owe to myself, will unite with whatever my country has a right to expect from me. In imposing upon me this task, I shall omit no "personal sacrifice that
 " may tend to the ease of his Majesty's govern-
 " ment, or the advancement of his service," as far as depends on my influence during the short period of my retaining the authority with which he so lately condescended to invest me. If in the hands of those, to whom I have been directed to transmit that authority, his Majesty's government shall feel embarrassments that may affect the general administration, I have the unanimous testimony of both his Houses of P——t here, I have their unanimous proceedings to prove, that no such

embarrassments existed in my days, and that I had no such to fear.

I had resolved never to enter in the most distant degree on any defence of my conduct, until I should be admitted into his Majesty's closet, where alone I should deign to answer the unjust charges that are urged against me. The desire of satisfying a friend, who, I know, is interested in my reputation and happiness, has imperceptibly led me into this rapid sketch of all my proceedings, since my arrival here; as I have done it, I not only have no objection but I even wish, that you will shew it to as many persons as you shall think proper.

F I N I S.