

A
L E T T E R

TO THE

REV. GEORGE MILLER, F. T. C. D.

AND

SECRETARY OF COUNCIL

TO THE

ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY,

FROM

T H O M A S W A L L A C E.

Containing some OBSERVATIONS *on a* PAMPHLET

WRITTEN BY

WILLIAM PRESTON,

RELATIVE TO THE PREFACE OF AN ESSAY

ON THE

MANUFACTURES OF IRELAND.

D U B L I N :

PRINTED BY CAMPBELL AND SHEA,

NO. 7, PITT-STREET

1798.

LETTER

W. GEORGE MILLER, F. T. C. D.

SECRETARY OF COUNCIL

THOMAS WALLACE

COMMISSIONER OF PATENT

RELATIVE TO THE

MANUFACTURE OF

ALL TO BE

PRINTED BY CAMPBELL AND

1878

1798

Houses of the Oireachtas

DEAR SIR,

IT has been said, that he who is raised to eminence, becomes a butt for envy—it is perhaps equally the misfortune of such men, that they are frequently considered as *butts* to write at. The very honourable situation which you fill, as a Secretary of the first Literary Society in this kingdom, has already set you up as a mark for *one* writer; may I presume to hope, Sir, you will have the patience to *stand fair* for another? To induce you to do so, I can only promise, that on my part, one *hit* only, shall be made at you, and that a few moments shall release your attention.

Having been for nearly four months past absent from this country, I learned, only by accident, on my arrival, that a Letter had been addressed to you, some time back, by Mr. Preston, relative to the Preface prefixed to my Essay on Manufactures.

That Mr. P. should have written something relating to the subject of that Preface, I did not wonder—for it was the opinion of other persons, as well as mine, that a gentleman of Mr. P's. character, should, in some way or other, account to the public for the apparent indelicacy of his conduct, in that transaction. I therefore perused Mr. P's. Letter, with that kind of curiosity, which one always feels, when an apparently inexplicable circumstance is about to be explained. I read, but am sorry to say, found little to satisfy my curiosity on that point on which only it was excited. Whether others, if others have thought it worth while to attend to the subject, have received more satisfaction, is not for me to judge—If they have, I rejoice at it—as well for the honour of Mr. P. himself, as for the honour of that character, which he sustains—that of a Scholar and a Gentleman.

As, however, the vindication of Mr. P's. character was a matter in which he only was concerned, I should not have troubled you, Sir, with any observations of mine on his Defence, however valid or weak that defence might have been, had not Mr. P. made, or insinuated, some charges against *me*, for which I should be very sorry that there were any just grounds. To those charges, the few observations with which I shall now trouble you, will principally relate—for with respect to Mr. P. I can with great truth assure him, I have no wish to give an unfavourable colour to his conduct, nor to fasten on him any imputation, which that conduct, considered in the most impartial manner, will not warrant. Had Mr. P. written in that spirit, and exhibited less strong symptoms of acerbity and anger, you would not now be troubled with my correspondence.

Mr. P. observes, that the transaction, which is the subject of his Letter, has been introduced to public notice, in a very *coarse* manner. If this expression related only to coarseness of language, as distinguished from the neat and polished style of Mr. P. I should have acquiesced in silence; for I know too well the defects of my own vocabulary, and how little equal I am to that gentleman, in working up the plainest materials, into oratorical beauty, and poetic smoothness; but it is evident from the tenour of Mr. P's. Letter, that he means a coarseness of idea—that coarseness which is apt to shock delicacy, and which, when it comes in collision with a mind like his, tremblingly alive to every fine feeling, creates a sensation of pain. If any thing which has escaped me in the Preface to which he alludes, has thus hurt Mr. P.—I lament it. Had I foreseen such an effect from it, I would have been more smooth—I would have endeavoured to sheathe the sharp points of any observations which fell from me, so as to render the friction of them less irritating to his softness.

I cannot

I cannot help thinking, however, that whatever might have been my coarseness of *expression*, Mr. P. has shewn an equal coarseness of *understanding*, when he says I “ have brought forward a *charge* against him, and thro’ his sides, against the Council of the Academy; no less a charge, indeed, than that of unfair dealing, in obtaining the præmium,” with which his Essay has been honoured. If you, Sir, have thought it worth your while to read the Preface to which he alludes, *your* understanding will perceive that I made no charge even against Mr. P. and much less against a body, which I respect so highly as the Council of the Academy. That Preface, you must have seen, was designed to account for the publication of the work, which it precedes—it therefore states facts, and facts only. If charges be involved in those facts, it is the delicacy or the sagacity of Mr. P. which must infer them, and if he has inferred a charge against himself, it is not for me to deny the correctness of his understanding. But if he insinuates that any charge of unfairness is made against the Council, or the Academy, I must say he infers that, which was, of all things, the most remote from the mind of the writer, and that which, I think, sound reasoning will not warrant.

To refute this insinuation of Mr. P. and to prevent him from making a common cause with either the Academy or the Council, is the chief reason which induces me now to trouble you. You will, therefore, permit me to be on this head a little precise and explicit.

Mr. P. asserts that my complaint against the Academy may be resolved into two charges: “ Delay in the adjudication, and a supposed unfairness in the mode by which that adjudication was at last obtained;” and then Mr. P. very ingeniously, and at great length, proves that “ *he* did not interfere with the Academy or the Council, to procure that delay.” To this I answer, that there is not in
my

my Preface the shadow of such a charge against him, and therefore when he labours to refute it, he wrestles with the wind. So far indeed am I from charging him with procuring the delay, that I agree perfectly with him, he must, by that delay, have been injured. The statement of his sufferings, is, no doubt, equally true and pathetic; when he tells us his manuscript was kept from him for twelve months, during which time he lost the "*inestimable advantage*," the dear delight, of revising and correcting it; he lost the opportunity of publishing in a *fair-weather season*, "while the horizon was not yet overcast by gloomy clouds, menacing a fatal storm;" nay, what is more than all this, he lost the glorious opportunity of being thought to have influenced the legislature in laying a certain duty on water-twist, and of boldly differing from them on the question of the tax on paper, a manufacture, which, being still in an infant state in Ireland, says Mr. P. "required to be *fostered* and *cherished*, instead of being *clogged* and *loaded* with any burden." All these are to be sure very serious losses, and most sincerely do I condole with Mr. P. on having suffered them, because, being an *equal* sufferer in almost all those instances, I feel as he must have felt. But I differ from Mr. P. when he says, I *complained* of the delay—I undoubtedly did think it would have been right and wise in the council, to have fulfilled literally, or as nearly as possible, their promise to the public—because I think justice claims such fulfilment for the candidate, and policy directs it—if it be of any use to the public, that for literary præmiums, candidates should appear—I might even have hinted that opinion—perhaps too I might have felt what Mr. P. my successful opponent, so *delicately* attributes to me, "spleen and disappointment," qualities which, I fear, unsuccessful candidates in some degree always feel: but the queruloufness of complaint, I scorned, and scorn; with me, I can assure him, neither spleen nor disappointment terminates in *that* issue.

My second complaint according to Mr. P. is unfairness in the mode of adjudging the prize—I here again contradict Mr. P. nothing like a charge of unfairness on the part of the Academy (indeed I blush at the imputation) was made by me—but as I think Mr. P. rather misunderstood than meant to misrepresent me, I shall explain as explicitly as I am able, my notion respecting that transaction.

In a word, then, I think the mode of a select committee of three, so chosen as that to which the council resorted to decide between the contending essays, was *injudicious*, not *unfair*. Unfairness seems to imply a fraudulent design, and who would attribute this to a set of Gentlemen of the first rank in this country, for probity, learning and talents? To act *injudiciously* is often the result of inattention, and why may not even those Gentlemen be thought liable to err from such a cause? To prove that they really did *not* attend to all the inconveniencies with which that mode might be attended, I refer only to the fact itself; had they considered that by deciding in this way, one of the competitors for the prize might himself become judge in the case, they would have guarded against that mischief;—but it appears, one of the competitors did really become his own judge; what further argument is necessary to prove that they acted inconsiderately? It may be said, there was but a very remote probability of this inconvenience occurring, because there is not one *Gentleman* in ten thousand who would suffer himself, if a candidate, to be appointed of the committee—I grant it, but yet it appears, that *that one of ten thousand* was actually to be met with.

There are other reasons why the appointment of a select Committee of three only, and those three selected only on account of their *leisure**, seems a bad mode of deciding on the merits of a work relating, not to a question of science or of letters, on the whole of which each individual might be able to form a competent knowledge, but to a question

co-extensive

* I infer this from what Mr. P. says of the transaction. See page 9 of his letter.

co-extensive with the natural and political capacities of a kingdom, and conversant about subjects on which literature and science can give no knowledge: a question on which no information can be gained but by laborious industry, not seeking in books for abstract notions, and metaphysic systems, but traversing wastes where fancy can find no flowers, dipping into enquiries which genius scorns to touch, and accumulating materials which learning would toss from her with disgust! Is it likely for instance, that a young clergyman just emerged from the abstruse studies of the fellow-ship course, could judge competently on the relative value to Ireland of a raw hide and a pound of yarn? Or that a doctor of physic with extensive practice, should calculate accurately the comparative advantages of a glasshouse and a pottery? And yet humble as these subjects appear, they must not be unknown to him who would judge truly between contending essays on national manufactures. If such essays, however, were submitted to the judgment of several men, promiscuously scholars, men of letters, and of the world, each would be able to ascertain in both, the relative merit of particular parts, and the superiority would be justly adjudged to that which should be approved by the majority.

Having thus explicitly declared my opinion respecting the delay of the Academy, and the mode in which they decided on the prize essays, and having proved that I neither complained of the Academy, nor insinuated that any thing *unfair* had been done by them in the adjudication. I am inclined to stop here; but my respect for Mr. P. will not suffer me to pass over, in what might be called contemptuous silence the rest of his vindication. I shall, therefore, with great deference, offer a few thoughts on that head: should they unfortunately tend rather to irritate his feeling than evince the propriety of his conduct, to himself who has called them forth the misfortune must be attributed.

However

However anxious Mr. P. appears to vindicate the character of the Council, on which no shadow of imputation had been made, and which if it had been attacked, would I think have found a more able champion, for *haud tali auxilio*, &c. yet he very properly perceives, that the great difficulty is to vindicate *himself*, not from any charge made by me, but from the obvious inference which facts have furnished—he therefore says,

‘ But I was one of the Select Committee—I disdain the insinuation attempted to be made from this, yet I foresaw there might be found persons capable of giving an unfair colouring to even an innocent transaction, and therefore, in the first instance, when I was *importuned* to be one of the Committee, I positively refused.’

It would, perhaps, have been for the honour of Mr. P. had he persevered in this laudable resolution, because as he very sagaciously foresaw, there are persons and great numbers of them in the world, who would be very apt to look unfavourably on this *innocent* transaction; but unfortunately tho’ Mr. P. was *coy* he was not *inexorable*—tho’ at first he nobly resisted importunity, yet when that *importunity* became a little more *importunate*, he—yielded! Female virtue has, alas! but too often vanished thus before a lover’s sighs! but that the masculine resolution of a man, an old man, a poet, and a philosopher, should so easily yield to a little wooing, alack-a-day! how it proves the effeminacy of times! But says Mr. P. “ I resisted till I could no longer find any *decent* pretext for resistance.” Let Mr. P. believe that there are persons who would think any pretext more *decent* than his accepting the situation, particularly as Mr. P. himself allows, that several “ other Gentlemen escaped the task by alledging their various avocations, deterred by the length of the essays.”

But, says Mr. P. again “ Mr. H. Usher, and Dr. Harvey were my coadjutors, and every one who knows those Gentle-

men must be sensible, that they would have rejected with marked indignation, any attempt on my part to bias their integrity." I have not the honour of being at all acquainted with either of those Gentlemen, but I agree with Mr. P. that their character, to which I give full credit, places them infinitely too high to be suspected either of injustice or partiality; nay, let Mr. P. himself believe that I think *him* incapable of the vile meanness of soliciting others to violate good faith in his favour. I am incapable of attributing such grossness to any man; but I maintain at the same time, that the frequent communication of an author with his judges, his opportunity of explaining what was obscure, and defending what was weak, if his opinion were solicited, as it was natural to suppose it might be when the author was himself sitting in the *disguise* of a judge; all these circumstances, I say, and others which I might name, would inevitably create a bias in his favour, without the slightest violation of truth, honour, and integrity on their part. Mr. P. however, asserts that this mischief did not result from his being of the Committee, for he tells you, he remains not only "*neuter and impartial*, but what was more, perfectly *passive and acquiescent*." If so, and I take Mr. P's. word for it, he certainly acted in that way in which when he once suffered himself to sit in judgment, he did me the *least* injury—but injury he did me even acting in this way, while at the same time he frustrated the intention of the Academy: he deprived *me* of the benefit which I might derive from the intelligence of an experienced and able judge, and by sitting a blank in that chair in which he could not act without injustice, he compelled the Academy to decide by the opinion of *two* members, that which they intended to have decided by *three*.

But says Mr. P. "the decision of the Committee was not *final*—the Essays lay on the table, the Council might have annulled the report, they confirmed it unanimously, and

and among those who voted for it were, Lord Charlemont, Mr. Kirwan, General Vallancy, Dr. Elrington, Dr. Browne, Mr. Greaves, and yourself Sir,—Were these Gentlemen” he triumphantly asks, “ignorant of the *subject matter* of the Essays? would *they* sport with their reputation, &c. &c. by a partial or inconsiderate adjudication of the prize?” Of all of these Gentlemen I think as highly and as respectfully as Mr. P. can do; of four of them, a long residence in the University has taught me to reverence the virtues, and respect the learning and the talents; and as to the venerable Nobleman whom Mr. P. has placed in front of the array, I protest I look up to him with a kind of feeling which would for ever prevent me, and I wish a similar feeling had prevented Mr. P. from naming him on an occasion so *little* as that by which we are occupied. With such sentiments it may be supposed I will answer Mr. P’s. quære’s in the negative—I allow in the first place, that these Gentlemen were not ignorant of the *subject matter* of the Essay—no, *they* knew the subject matter nearly in the same manner as the *public* know the subject matter of Mr. P’s. book, from his *table of contents*; but they knew little more. They could not have read and compared the Essays minutely and with attention, for if they could, there would have been no need of referring them to a select Committee. I am convinced also they would not “sport with their own characters, compromise the character of the Academy, counteract the patriotic tendency of the question, or violate the principles of integrity by a *partial* adjudication of the prize;” whether there was any thing *inconsiderate* in the *adjudication*, let every man judge for himself, when he reflects that the *decision* was *not* made on the principle which the Council themselves adopted, for they determined that *three* members should determine on the merit of the work; by Mr. P. suffering himself to become an inefficient or a partial judge, *two* only gave a fair opinion.

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But “ a fortnight elapsed between the decision and the award ; why was this, says Mr. P. but that every member of Council might compare the report of the secret Committee with the prize Essays, and examine whether it was founded in justice ? ” I answer it could not be for any such purpose, because, if in twelve months the Council *collectively* had not been able to get thro’ a perusal of the works, and therefore were obliged to refer them to a Committee, they could not *individually* have perused them in a fortnight ; and without perusal they could form no judgment of the merits. If Mr. P. reasons in filling up his “ table of contents ” as he does in this part of his letter, the public certainly need not regret the suppression of the contents themselves.

Having now adverted to Mr. P’s. defence, I must take some notice of what concerns myself personally. Mr. P. charges me with expending much pains of *colouring* and *insinuation* on this transaction : let me assure Mr. P. there is nothing I so much disdain or avoid as *insinuation*—whatever sentiments I entertain are generally very openly avowed, and with respect to Mr. P. and the Academy, I think I have already been open and explicit. Lest there should, however, still remain doubt about what I have advanced on these heads, I repeat in the first place, that with respect to the Academy and the Council whose good and great name it is as much above my power as it is far from my wish to injure, I think they acted from the most pure, upright, and patriotic motives ; I think, however, with very great humility, and it may be perhaps with a judgment under a partial bias, that the mode in which they decided was *injudicious* and *incautious*. With respect to Mr. P. himself, I am as free to say openly, without colouring or insinuation that in suffering the Council, in their ignorance of the fact, to appoint him judge in his own case, *he* rendered mischievous the incautious mode which the Council had adopted, and did that which a gentleman and
a man

a man of sound sense always most cautiously avoids ;— When I say this, I am equally free to declare it as my opinion, that however Mr. P. may have injured me by this conduct, I am convinced he had not the most distant idea of acting with ill-faith.

Let me now be permitted to add, that it is Mr. P. who seems to deal in colouring and insinuation ; What does he mean, but to insinuate something more than is expressed, when he says, “ The public will know and feel what estimation, and what epithets are due to him, who, in a moment of spleen and disappointment, could rashly sport with the good name of the society, and the individual.” It would have been more bold and manly in Mr. P. to have spoken his *own* mind, whatever it is, on this subject, and the *application* of it, than to deal in these oblique references to the public. I confess I should be very glad to hear Mr. P. express himself a little *explicitly* on these points.

In the last place, Mr. P. comes to discuss a subject, in which the public, as well as Mr. P. is interested— “ Why has not his book been published ?” It must certainly have been the intention of Mr. Cunningham, who, for public benefit, bequeathed 50l. for an Essay, that that Essay should be given to the public—Why Mr. P. after getting the money, should keep his work in his closet, it behoved him to account for—Permit me to say, Sir, that in attempting to do this, he seems to be a little embarrassed. The substance of his defence on this head, is his *MODESTY*, and yet there appear thro’ that delicate veil, some scintillations of conscious sufficiency. He avows a consciousness of defect in his production, but he will not admit *relative* inferiority—in the council he could discover *no variance* of *opinion*, on the *merit* of his Essay, yet his modesty will not let him publish. Well ! but all this is private matter between Mr. P. and the Council, and unfortunately the public, too, are to be satisfied ; how are the

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the public to judge? “ Oh! very well,” says Mr. P. “ The public have already before them the unsuccessful Effay—and to enable them to compare, I herewith give them”—what? “ My TABLE OF CONTENTS! Let MY choice of topics, and arrangement of my subject matter, speak for themselves!” This is incomparable! the most happy mode of trying the sagacity of the public, which has yet been thought of—For this only, Mr. P. deserved a prize.

That it is only Mr. P's. table of contents, we are at present to be gratified with, I lament.—I rejoice, however, that tho' at present we cannot hope to be favoured with Mr. P's. Effay, yet he affords us some reason to expect, at a future day, *some* Effay, on Manufactures—“ When he shall have made further enquiry and observation, when he shall have collected more details, not only by reference to books, but by conversation with intelligent persons acquainted with the subject;” then will Mr. P. give his work to the public. With him the reception of the reward, is but an excitement to industry, for in a style which has too commonly been called *Irish*, he receives the prize first, and labours to deserve it afterwards. The public, no doubt, will benefit by this, and yet *I* am selfish enough to regret it, because when Mr. P's. book shall come into the world, if I live at that time, I shall lose the advantage I had promised myself, of comparing my humble production, with *that* which bore away the meed—of tracing those marks of superior information, and more just reasoning, which must have induced the judges of both, to impress on it the sanction of their approbation. I regret that Mr. P's. Effay is not to be published in its original state, for another reason, because it shews the futility of that argument which detained my manuscript, namely, “ lest its publication in an improved state, might one day impeach the judgment of the Council!” Alas! its small stock of merit, must now remain a
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fixed quantity, while that of my competitor's is verging, like the spirits of just men, toward infinite improvement!

It is time I should conclude Sir: the subject upon which I have been writing to you, is indeed too trifling to occupy your attention for five minutes—to you therefore I should apologize; to the public apology is unnecessary, for no doubt the public will trouble themselves little with an affair in which Mr. P. and I are the only parties. I cannot, however, terminate my letter without thanking Mr. P. for the *modest* liberality with which he permits me to give energy and quickness to these sluggish times for bookfelling by the use of *his* name. In these days of *democratic rage*, Sir, the use of a good name is highly valuable; I must inform him, however, that having, with less caution than himself, ventured on *book making* in a bad season, and made so much less than he has done by my first venture, I intend for the present to give up the *trade*, nor will I resume it until I find, like some others, that to be in a profession without practice, is still worse than to be an author without fame.

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Rev. Sir,

Yours, &c.

THOMAS WALLACE.

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