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A
LETTER
 FROM
 AN OLD FRIEND,
 TO THE
CONGREGATION
 OF THE
 CHAPEL
 AT
 OLD DEER.



ABERDEEN: PRINTED BY J. CHALMERS AND CO. 1798.

GOOD PEOPLE,

YOU will, no doubt, be surpris'd at an Address of this kind; but when you see the name at the end of it, I hope, whatever reception it may meet with, it will, at least, appear excuseable, as coming from an old man, who six and forty years ago, had something of a *pastoral charge* in the Episcopal Congregation of Old Deer:—a Congregation, which was then, as it still is, a conspicuous part of the Episcopal *profession* in Scotland.—This charge was earnestly recommended to me by their then worthy Pastor, with whom I had the happiness of living in strict fraternal bonds of mutual friendship and intimacy for nine years: in consequence of which, finding himself on the decline, he had often requested me, and the very night in which he died, pressing renewed the request, that I would be as assistant as possible to his dear Flock, when he left them, and do all I could to preserve them stedfast in the Communion of the Scotch Episcopal Church; to which, both from principle and family-connexion, he was zealously attached himself, and had been at great pains to train up his people in the same attachment. Accordingly, when he was taken from us, in hearty compliance with his dying request, and at the particular desire of our then Bishop, who had their interest much at heart, and was anxious to get them provided with a Pastor as soon as possible, I began, from the time of Mr. Livingstone's death, which happened about the middle of December, 1751, to perform Divine Service every Sunday in the Congregation at Old Deer, and continued to do so for several months, in the confined way to which the people of our Communion were at that time unhappily reduced. There are, no doubt, *some* among you, *few* perhaps, but still, I presume, some, who will remember, (and to them I appeal) how ready I was, though many times with great inconvenience, from the attendance due to my own numerous and extensive charge, to perform every occasional
office

office to which I was called, without reluctance or delay, through all that severe winter, and most of the ensuing summer.— Many were the wearisome journies in the worst of weather, which I struggled with in that service, being then, I thank God, blest with a body that grudged no fatigue, and a spirit that feared no danger, especially when engaged in what was *then* thought a good cause :— a cause which I had most sincerely at heart, as well from motives of particular friendship, as from a sense of general duty. You will judge, therefore, how much I was disappointed, when towards the end of the year, after Mr. Livingstone's death, some of his people began already to talk of deserting the church, in which he had left them, and applications were making for that purpose, which rendered it necessary for me to offer my services only to those who seemed desirous of them, and were still willing to wait with patience, till they should see, what their Bishop could do for them. In this fluctuating and divided state matters continued among them, to the sad disquiet of many a conscientious member of the Congregation, till about Whitsunday 1753, when upon an information given against me, as a nonjuring Clergyman, to the Sheriff, (from what quarter it is needless now to inquire, and might be thought invidious to conjecture) I was carried to prison, to the utter disappointment of all my labours, to the just alarm of my neighbouring brethren, and at the visible, perhaps, intended risk of desolating my own dear and now disconsolate flock. This unexpected stroke, at such a critical time, put an end almost to every difference of sentiment in the neighbouring Congregation, and united the greater part of them, some from choice, and some from what they called necessity, in the resolution of inviting an English-ordained Clergyman to come and settle among them : which settlement accordingly took place, before the six months of my legal confinement were elapsed, and I have ever since remained a quiet spectator of the unhappy effects produced by it. Being, however, wholly unprecedented, at least in this retired corner

ner of our church, it was viewed for a while in so strange a light, even by many of those who had been the promoters of it, that it was thought necessary to say something in vindication of it. It was therefore alledged, that there was really no sort of difference between those English-ordained Clergy and us, but in the bare article of praying for the king by *name*, which difference, you will observe, is now completely done away. Yea, it was farther urged, as the strongest argument for our acquiescing in these new settlements, that when candidly examined, they would be found *friendly* and *favourable*, serving as a sort of protection to us, by intimidating our enemies, and shewing them the folly of harassing us any longer : for at that time *Presbyterians* were considered as the only enemies of *Episcopacy*. This was, at least, a plausible pretext, and no doubt had its weight with many at the period I am looking back to. How far it has since been realized, it is surely from experience that we are best enabled to judge ; and that experience has fully convinced us, that these settlements of English-ordained Clergy, instead of being *friendly* and *favourable*, have been most hurtful and prejudicial to the interests of Scotch Episcopacy, as could be shewn in a number of instances, wherein the opposition has been plainly avowed, and every method taken to prejudice the people, and keep them at a distance from our communion. In proof of this, I shall only beg leave to put you in mind of what was lately advanced at a general meeting of your congregation, held for the purpose of providing an assistant and successor to your present Pastor. On that occasion, I am told from very good authority, that the Clergy of the Church to which I belong, under the old and odious title of *Nonjurors*, were publicly charged with teaching doctrines and adopting practices, of such a dangerous or improper tendency, that it was thought necessary to warn you all, in a solemn manner, to beware of, and avoid them. Will any one say, that this was *friendly* and *favourable*, or meant as such by the person who brought forward such an invidious charge ?
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In this short address to you, I do not think that I have any occasion to vindicate either our principles or our practices: thank God, they are such as have stood, and will stand the test of any inquiry that may be made into them, whether of a candid or cavilling nature. I only ask, and beg of our accuser to say, What difference there is between our principles and practices at present, and those of the Episcopal Congregation of Old Deer at the time he entered among them, except it be in one article, with respect to which, he surely will not say, we have changed to the worse? Till some such material difference be pointed out, as gives sufficient ground for the charge you have heard against us, however unkindly intended, you cannot in equity draw any other conclusion from it than this, that if it be not well-founded, it reflects upon the Author of it, and if it be just against us, it reflects at the same time upon the Person whom he succeeded, whose memory, to my certain knowledge, was long dear in your Congregation, and with such of you as remember him, is not, I hope, even at this day, so contemptible as some people have been endeavouring to make it. In either of these views, therefore, let this silly censure operate, as far as it may; it can do us no harm, and I scorn to retort.

Another mark of *friendly* regard which we have of late years experienced from the same quarter, is an attempt to shew the nullity of *our* Episcopacy, founded upon the wild *Erafrican* notion, that the Bishops of Scotland who were ejected from their livings, in consequence of the Revolution in 1688, “when they lost their temporal jurisdiction, lost their spiritual powers also:” an opinion so ridiculously absurd, and inconsistent with all that we know of the original constitution of the Christian Church, that I should not have thought it worth my while to take notice of it, if you had not heard it accompanied with a pretended disbelief of what was said in favour of our Episcopacy, by no less a person than the present Bishop of Rochester, when

when in the year 1792, that distinguished Prelate stood up to plead our cause, in the great Council of the nation, with a strength of argument and dignity of mind, which did him equal honour as a Christian Bishop, and a British Senator. To be sure, his Lordship's speech on that memorable occasion, if acknowledged to be genuine, bears hard upon what he called the *crippled* Episcopacy, that would be upheld in Scotland by Pastors of English ordination; and as you have been told, that the genuineness of it depends upon the veracity of a near friend of mine, whose character in that respect has never yet been called in question, let those who affect to doubt it make application to Bishop Horsely himself, and I am willing to stake the whole dispute between us, upon the issue of his answer. After all, I can hardly suppose, that the Speech is *really* disbelieved: Only as it pinches so hard, it has been thought prudent, rather than find fault with it, to deny it altogether, and out of delicacy to an *English* Bishop, to make free with a *Scotch* one. Yet we can produce from the pen of an English Divine, of no small repute in his own Church, an equal, if not stronger testimony in our favour, from another distinguished Prelate of the Church of England, the pious and venerable Dr Horne, late Bishop of Norwich, of whom his Biographer records this anecdote, that, "from the present circumstances of the Scotch Episcopal Church, it's primitive orthodoxy, piety, poverty, and depressed state, he had such an opinion of it, as to think, that if the great Apostle of the Gentiles were upon earth, and it were put to his choice, with what denomination of Christians he would communicate, the preference would probably be given to the Episcopalians of Scotland, as most like to the people he had been used to."* After such a strong de-

* See the life of Dr Horne, by Mr Jones, (p. 151) who has mentioned several other instances of the kind attention paid by that worthy Bishop to the interests of the Scotch Episcopal Church, of which he was pleased to entertain a very friendly and favourable opinion.

claration

claration in our favour, from one so well qualified to judge of what was, or was not, a valid Episcopacy, and a true Church, it might have been hoped, that nothing more was necessary, “to convince the gainsayers,” and establish this as a certain truth, acknowledged at least by two of the brightest ornaments of the English Bench, that a succession of Bishops has been as duly and regularly preserved in Scotland, as in England, or in any other Episcopal Church upon earth. The just and necessary consequence of which is, that those who profess to be of the Episcopal Communion in Scotland, if they would act consistently with their profession, ought to acknowledge and live in communion with, and receive the benefits of the Episcopal function from, the Bishops of Scotland, unless it can be shewn, that the terms of communion prescribed by these Bishops are sinful or contrary to the word of God. But this has never yet been shewn, though some attempts have been made that way, by those who wish to keep up the present unhappy division, and frustrate every hope of union among the Episcopalians in Scotland. With this view, our Scotch Communion Office has for some years been held out as the great bone of contention; and you have no doubt heard our Church struck at with the old rusty weapon of *Popery*, because we use the primitive mixture in the sacramental Cup, and in our prayer for the whole state of *Christ's church*, conclude with a pious wish, “that at the day of the general resurrection, we and all
 “they who are of the mystical body of Christ, may be
 “set on his right hand, &c.” These two articles make up the whole of *our Popery*; and I cannot help thinking, that it is paying, what is *really Popery*, by far too great a compliment, to carry it up to the high pitch of venerable antiquity, which these obnoxious articles have to boast of. But not to enter on this vast field of controversy, where we should find many more sound Divines, and able writers *for us*, than *against us*, I would only ask, were the compilers of the first reformed Liturgy of England *popish?*

Yet

Yet all that we observe was enjoined in that Liturgy, which contained petitions for the dead in much more express terms, than any we have ever used. With respect to the saints departed (who are the only *dead*, to whom our prayers have any reference) it is our belief, that they are *not* as yet in heaven: the Church of Rome has declared from its infallible chair, that they *are*, and those who find fault with our practice, must believe so too if they are consistent. Are not they, therefore, who join *with* the Papists in belief, more Popish than we who differ *from* them in prayer? For the Saints whom they pray *to*, as already in heaven, we only pray *for* their happy admission to that glorious place, which surely constitutes a very material difference, and is indeed the strongest antidote that has been, or can be offered against the, perhaps, most dangerous corruption in all the system of what is now called *Popery*.

You will observe, good people, that I have not begun this unpleasant altercation. I have only stood upon the defence, which, by what I have represented to you of former times, it will appear, that I was, both from public character, and personal considerations, justly entitled to do. And now that I have been thus forced to take up the pen, before I lay it down, let me as a *friend*, at least, thought so by your predecessors, be allowed to expostulate a little with you, on the nature, the truly pitiable nature of your present situation. You boast, I hope, of being an *Episcopal* Congregation, as *Episcopacy* has, at least, an agreeable sound with you. But it is merely the *sound* you are pleased with; for you have nothing else, none of the essentials of, or comforts to be derived from, it. You cannot make yourselves Episcopal, any more than you can make yourselves Christians. The privileges of both must come to you from another quarter, Christian privileges from your relation to Christ, Episcopal privileges from your connexion with a Bishop. Believing that there is a Christ, does not make a Christian; believing

believing that there are Bishops, does not make a person Episcopal. I am addressing those who are taught, that they are *made* members of Christ, (that is, Christians) in and by baptism, and the parallel I am stating, is fully applicable to such. Ask a member of the Establishment, what it is that constitutes a Presbyterian Congregation, and he will tell you, their being connected with, and subject to, the particular Presbytery to which they belong. Ask one of our Church, what it is that constitutes an Episcopal Congregation, he will tell you, their being connected with, and subject to, the particular Bishop, to whom they belong. Let a question of the same kind be put to any of you, what have you to answer? What consistent account can you give of the religious persuasion, by which you wish to be distinguished? No Bishop has appeared among you, in the regular discharge of his official duty, for forty years and upwards: and is not this strange and without example in a Congregation, calling itself *Episcopal*? If all you have in view, be only to distinguish yourselves from the *national* Establishment, there are other denominations in our country, such as Seceders, Methodists, Bereans, Independents, some of which I would recommend as more proper for you to assume, that you may no longer abuse the name of *Episcopal*, which, however fond you may be of it, cannot with any propriety be applied to your situation, nor will you find it an easy matter, notwithstanding your long possession, to make good your claim to it. For if there be in the Ecclesiastical records such a thing as the *Catholic* Church: if there be such a thing to be met with as *National* Churches, with regular succession and power of discipline within themselves, independent of, but connected in bonds of Christian Faith and Communion with one another, and thereby forming the great aggregate body of the Catholic church, then I say, and I am warranted by the established doctrine of the church of England to say, that unless you can exhibit something more than

than your assumed, and disputable denomination of *Episcopal*, to prove that you belong to some national church, you have no title to be, or be reckoned, a part of what scripture and antiquity hold to be the Church Catholic. A real and true Episcopal Church, under its own Bishops, was once the national Church of Scotland, and at that time, such settlements as these of yours, if attempted, would have been deemed schismatical, and stigmatized as such. An alteration of the Establishment took place in consequence of the Revolution; but when the subsequent union incorporated the two kingdoms of Scotland and England into one state, no such thing was proposed as an incorporation of the two churches, and to this day we speak of them as distinct and separate bodies, and though we say, the British *state*, we always say, the British *churches*, even with different views in so saying. I would therefore, ask, To what national Church do you belong? To the present Scotch Episcopal Church, which has all the marks of apostolic doctrine and fellowship that the three first centuries would have required in a national church, such Congregations as yours are acting in direct opposition: and as for the church of England, of which they are taught to consider themselves as a part, whatever sentiments, for political reasons, she might once have entertained or professed towards them, as leading them to imagine, that they belonged to that church, she has now *virtually* disclaimed all such, in as far as she has, in a solemn and public manner, acknowledged the validity and regularity of our Episcopacy, and therefore cannot be supposed so inconsistent as to make such a friendly acknowledgement *of* us, and at the same time patronize and support an avowed and *now* groundless separation *from* us. But the whole of this dispute between you and us, I might have rested on an argument, which some of you will perhaps remember, was made use of, when your present settlement was in agitation, by a person who at that time was equally hostile both to you
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and us, that "Episcopacy was either a good or a bad thing : if it was a good thing, we had it in Scotland, " if it was a bad thing, we need not seek it from England." This state of the argument is in the strict mode of logical reasoning, and bating the prejudice attached to the author, is as unanswerable as it is plain.

I have still, however, something to say on the nature of your present ecclesiastical Constitution, in which I think, you can hardly fail to agree with me, because whatever you may wish to be said in favour of it, you must allow, that at best it is lame and defective in some matters of no small importance, which have always been considered as annexed to, and inseparable from, Episcopacy in it's full extent. I might put you in mind of one particular, which has been always thought, not only of great consideration, but even *essential* to every society under the denomination of a regular church, and that is, what you are taught to pray for, " the Unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace." There are two eminent writers, in the large catalogue of ancients, who handle this subject, and whom the christian church has always looked back to with just veneration, Ignatius Bishop of Antioch, and Cyprian Bishop of Carthage : and it is well known how fully they explain, how warmly they enforce, as the principal scope of all their writings, this *Unity*, and peremptorily fix it to one point, not to the vague sound of Episcopacy in general, or to *a* Bishop or Bishops at random, but to *one*, to *the* Bishop, the particular Bishop of a certain district or diocese, who in virtue of this inherent prerogative of his office, was, in these early days, believed to be the principle or centre of unity to the *portio gregis*, the portion of the great flock, committed to his care, and the sole intermediate bond of connexion between them, and the Bishop of Souls, the glorious *head* of the whole body.— Perhaps many of you are strangers to these two old venerable martyrs : but every *true* son of the church of England, is, or ought to be acquainted with them ; and

to all such I appeal, whether the doctrine of these primitive fathers be not, as I have stated it, and consequently how far your present situation can, or will upon comparison, be found to agree with their description of a Christian congregation. Here, therefore, if primitive example be of any weight among you, there is a manifest defect, and such as would have been sadly felt and deeply regretted by every Episcopal congregation of those times, if such congregations could possibly have existed under it. But this is not all: for as one misfortune commonly brings on another, the defect I have now mentioned has produced, what is equally dangerous and unprimitive, the want of church discipline, or of the exercise of that power which is lodged in *the* Bishop, of restraining and punishing abuses of any kind, in either clergy or laity, by St. Paul's spiritual rod of ecclesiastical censures. You have read, that the angels of the seven churches in Asia, who, I hope, you are taught to believe, were the several Bishops of these several churches, were by high authority either reproved or commended for their respective behaviour in inspecting and governing, every one the *particular* church committed to him.— May I not, therefore, ask, where, or who is the Bishop, that deserves either reproof or commendation for his particular inspection of your congregation, or for the exercise of Episcopal authority in any such as yours, unless you will say, what the faults and frailties of human nature, and even experience itself, will not permit to be said, that neither clergy nor laity ever stand in need of any such restraint among you. But these two wants, of ecclesiastical unity and discipline, however grievous in themselves, yet being not so immediately visible in their effects, which are mostly of an inward quality, may not perhaps, impress you all so deeply as they ought: I shall, therefore, take the liberty of mentioning something of this kind more outward and visible, which you all must acknowledge, and many of you, I know, do lament, I mean,
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the want of the sacred ordinance of confirmation, a want, which those I am addressing have been lying under, for full *forty* years, the space of time that God was grieved with his people in the wilderness. I am not at present called upon to prove the great benefit of this venerable institution, nor how necessary the due celebration of it has been ever esteemed in the church of England, and among all who profess to be of the Episcopal persuasion, as surely no attempt will be made by any such, to bring into contempt what has so much antiquity on it's side, and been so long considered as one of the great advantages of Apostolic Episcopacy. Yet this so ancient, so salutary, and by all true members of the church of England so much desired, blessing, you have had no share in, nor can expect to have any, while you continue in your present situation: which, I think, amounts almost to a demonstration of what I have been putting you in mind of, that you belong to no Bishop, and no Bishop belongs to you, as I have ground to believe there never was a congregation that had a Bishop, and wanted confirmation so long as you have done. You will be inclined, no doubt to say, that you are sensible of this want, but cannot help it; and I am entitled to say in return, that *now* at least you *can* help it: for whatever impediments from our side might have formerly lain in your way, as I am willing to make all the allowances for you that I can, these are at last happily removed, and no bar now appears, either civil or ecclesiastical, against your enjoying all the benefits of a regular Episcopacy which a state of toleration can admit of, and which is all that we or you either have to expect. All this you know, and I could explain further, if delicacy of connexion would allow me.--There is, it seems, a providential door opened among you, for a trial, at least, of having your congregational wants *regularly* supplied: and if this door be neglected by you, or shut against you, by those who are endeavouring to mislead you, where, in the sight of God, must the blame lie? It
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has been urged, I hear, against such a trial, that it would be a forsaking the communion into which most of you have been baptised, and I acknowledge the force of this plea, as there are few can urge it with a better grace than I can do. From your present Pastor too, I own it might come properly enough, if it were not encumbered with some difficulties that need to be explained. For in the first place, I would be glad to know, what is that communion, upon the premises I have laid down, into which he has baptised you? Why, you will say, it is the Communion of the Church of England. But how can that be, when your Pastor himself is not within the pale, nor under the jurisdiction of that church, and you, as his congregation, have no other relation to it, than what arises from the accidental circumstance of using it's liturgy? A circumstance which may occasionally take place in any congregation of Dissenters, whether in Scotland or England, and therefore can be no true mark of church communion in either country. But supposing that your Pastor had really baptised a considerable number of his present congregation into the communion of the church of England, yet a second question still remains to be answered, What was the communion into which the people among whom he entered, had been baptised? Was not that undisputably the communion of the Episcopal church of Scotland? And if so, where would be the harm or impropriety of bringing back his present flock to the communion in which he found his original one, and all of them fully satisfied with it, if they could have got it retained? Perhaps it will be said, that now, after such a length of time, it would not be *convenient*, on many accounts, to be attempting such a change. But convenience is one thing, and conscience another. When both these can be gratified, it is well, but when that cannot be done, surely, I need not say, to what side the preference is due. In the choice of religious principles, no man who thinks as he ought on such a serious subject, will allow him-

himself to be swayed by motives of worldly interest or convenience.— But if I could possibly suppose, that you would suffer matters of so small consideration to have any weight in the great business of your salvation, it would give me pleasure to assure you, as I can do, from the very best authority, that in the communion of the church to which I would willingly recal you, none of you run the smallest risk of hurting your temporal interest: for as the law now stands, persons of every rank or station are at full liberty to join in its public worship, and may safely attend divine service in any Episcopal chapel of the Scotch church, where the King and Royal Family are prayed for by name, as the law directs. Accordingly these chapels are now attended by Peers of the realm, by Lieutenants, and Deputy Lieutenants in the several counties, by Officers of every rank in the army, and civil Magistrates in town and country; all these being perfectly sensible, that his Majesty has no better subjects, nor persons more attached to his government on principles of permanent loyalty, than the Bishops and Clergy of the Scotch Episcopal Church. What then should now hinder you from returning to the communion of that church, in which, it is certain, your worldly interests can suffer no injury, and your spiritual concerns will be attended to, with that decent order and regularity, in which the God of Peace delights, and which the blessed Son of his love has established in his church, as the means of preserving its members in the unity of the spirit, and in the bond of peace. By expostulating with you in this manner, I shall perhaps incur the charge of interfering in other people's matters, and sowing division among neighbours. My interference has been already accounted for, and shewn to arise from the well known principle of self-defence, and a natural desire to say something in vindication of those, with whom I am officially and closely connected. And as for sowing division, though I might plead the example which was set me, at the time, when
your

your present settlement commenced, and when, to my certain knowledge, every method was taken to sow division, in order to get that measure accomplished, yet as I did not approve of it *then*, I have no desire to make it my defence *now*, but shall plainly and honestly acknowledge, that if to warn people of what I think their danger, and in the bowels of christian charity and friendship to point out to them, what appears to me the only way to avoid it, be considered as sowing division, I am guilty, and must answer for it at another bar, where, I pray God, that no heavier charge may be produced against me. I have no interest in your resolutions in any way whatsoever; and as at my time of life, within two or three years of *eighty*, I have nothing to hope from the applause, or to fear from the censure of the world, I value not the contempt of any, who can sneer, but cannot answer. Happy indeed should I be, if it should please that Almighty Grace, “which alone worketh great marvels,” to prosper my weak, but well intended, endeavours, for bringing about an union so much desired, with perfect harmony among, and satisfaction to, *all* concerned: In which case, though from the prevailing humour of the times, I am not so sanguine as expect it, I would, God willing, make a push, old and infirm as I am, to appear once more, as an assisting brother in the Chapel of Old Deer, as I had frequently done *fifty* years ago, with great pleasure to myself, and, as the taste then went, with some degree of approbation from others.

But, good people, I have done, and shall leave what I have written to it's fate: subscribing myself in the mean time, from love and regard to the memory of your predecessors, and as our good old Scotch phrase runs—

FOR AULD LANG SYNE,

Your friend and well-wisher,

LINSHART, Feb. 1, 1798.

JOHN SKINNER.

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