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TWO LETTERS

FROM

MR. BURKE,

ON THE

BILLS relative to the Trade of  
IRELAND.

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[Price One Shilling.]

(3)



TWO LETTERS  
FROM  
MR. BURKE  
TO  
GENTLEMEN  
IN THE  
CITY OF BRISTOL,  
ON THE  
BILLS DEPENDING IN PARLIAMENT  
RELATIVE TO THE  
TRADE OF IRELAND.

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MDCCLXXVIII.



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T O

**SAMUEL SPAN, Esq;**

Master of the Society of Merchants Adventurers of Bristol.

S I R,

**I** AM honoured with your letter of the 13th, in answer to mine, which accompanied the resolutions of the House relative to the trade of Ireland.

You will be so good as to present my best respects to the Society, and to assure them, that it was altogether unnecessary to remind me of the interest of the constituents. I have never regarded any thing else, since I had a seat in parliament. Having frequently and maturely considered that interest, and stated it

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to myself in almost every point of view, I am persuaded, that, under the present circumstances, I cannot more effectually pursue it, than by giving all the support in my power to the propositions which I lately transmitted to the Hall.

The fault I find in the scheme is,—that it falls extremely short of that liberality in the commercial system, which, I trust, will one day be adopted. If I had not considered the present resolutions, merely as preparatory to better things, and as a means of shewing experimentally, that justice to others is not always folly to ourselves, I should have contented myself with receiving them in a cold and silent acquiescence. Separately considered, they are matters of no very great importance. But they aim, however imperfectly, at a right principle. I submit to the restraint to appease prejudice: I accept the enlargement,

ment, so far as it goes, as the result of reason and of sound policy.

We cannot be insensible of the calamities which have been brought upon this nation by an obstinate adherence to narrow and restrictive plans of government. I confess, I cannot prevail on myself to take them up, precisely at a time, when the most decisive experience has taught the rest of the world to lay them down. The propositions in question did not originate from me, or from my particular friends. But when things are so right in themselves, I hold it my duty, not to enquire from what hands they come. I opposed the American measures upon the very same principle on which I support those that relate to Ireland. I was convinced, that the evils which have arisen from the adoption of the former, would be infinitely aggravated by the rejection of the latter.



Perhaps Gentlemen are not yet fully aware of the situation of their country, and what its exigencies absolutely require. I find that we are still disposed to talk at our ease, and as if all things were to be regulated by our good pleasure. I should consider it as a fatal symptom, if, in our present distressed and adverse circumstances, we should persist in the errors which are natural only to prosperity. One cannot indeed sufficiently lament the continuance of that spirit of delusion, by which, for a long time past, we have thought fit to measure our necessities by our inclinations. Moderation, prudence, and equity, are far more suitable to our condition, than loftiness, and confidence, and rigour. We are threatened by enemies of no small magnitude, whom, if we think fit, we may despise, as we have despised others; but they are enemies  
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who can only cease to be truly formidable, by our entertaining a due respect for their power. Our danger will not be lessened by our shutting our eyes to it; nor will our force abroad be increased by rendering ourselves feeble, and divided at home.

There is a dreadful schism in the British nation. Since we are not able to reunite the empire, it is our business to give all possible vigour and soundness to those parts of it which are still content to be governed by our councils. Sir, it is proper to inform you, that our measures *must be healing*. Such a degree of strength must be communicated to all the members of the state, as may enable them to defend themselves, and to co-operate in the defence of the whole. Their temper too must be managed, and their good affections cultivated. They may then be disposed to

bear the load with cheerfulness, as a contribution towards what may be called with truth and propriety, and not by an empty form of words, *a common cause*. Too little dependence cannot be had, at this time of day, on names and prejudices. The eyes of mankind are opened; and communities must be held together by an evident and solid interest. God forbid, that our conduct should demonstrate to the world, that Great Britain can, in no instance whatsoever, be brought to a sense of rational and equitable policy, but by coercion and force of arms!

I wish you to recollect, with what powers of concession, relatively to commerce, as well as to legislation, his Majesty's Commissioners to the United Colonies have failed from England within this week. Whether these powers are sufficient for their purposes, it is not

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now my business, to examine. But we all know, that our resolutions in favour of Ireland are trifling and insignificant, when compared with the concessions to the Americans. At such a juncture, I would implore every man, who retains the least spark of regard to the yet remaining honour and security of this country, not to compel others to an imitation of their conduct; or by passion and violence, to force them to seek in the territories of the separation, that freedom, and those advantages, which they are not to look for whilst they remain under the wings of their ancient government.

After all, what are the matters we dispute with so much warmth? Do we in these resolutions *bestow* any thing upon Ireland? Not a shilling. We only consent to *leave* to them, in two or three instances, the use of the natu-

ral faculties which God has given to them, and to all mankind. Is Ireland united to the crown of Great Britain for no other purpose, than that we should counteract the bounty of Providence in her favour? And in proportion as that bounty has been liberal, that we are to regard it as an evil, which is to be met with in every sort of corrective? To say that Ireland interferes with us, and therefore must be checked, is, in my opinion, a very mistaken, and a very dangerous principle. I must beg leave to repeat, what I took the liberty of suggesting to you in my last letter, that Ireland is a country, in the same climate, and of the same natural qualities and productions, with this; and has consequently no other means of growing wealthy in herself, or, in other words, of being useful to us, but by doing the very same things which we  
do,

do, for the same purposes. I hope that in Great Britain we shall always pursue, without exception, *every* means of prosperity ; and of course, that Ireland *will* interfere with us in something or other ; for either, in order to *limit* her, we *must restrain* ourselves, or we must fall into that shocking conclusion, that we are to keep our yet remaining dependency, under a general and indiscriminate restraint, for the mere purpose of oppression. Indeed, Sir, England and Ireland may flourish together. The world is large enough for us both. Let it be our care, not to make ourselves too little for it.

I know it is said, that the people of Ireland do not pay the same taxes, and therefore ought not in equity to enjoy the same benefits with this. I had hopes, that the unhappy phantom of a compulsory *equal taxation* had haunted

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us long enough. I do assure you, that until it is entirely banished from our imaginations, (where alone it has, or can have any existence,) we shall never cease to do ourselves the most substantial injuries. To that argument of equal taxation, I can only say,—that Ireland pays as many taxes, as those who are the best judges of her powers, are of opinion she can bear. To bear more she must have more ability; and in the order of nature, the advantage must *precede* the charge. This disposition of things, being the law of God, neither you nor I *can* alter it. So that if you will have more help from Ireland, you must *previously* supply her with more means. I believe it will be found, that if men are suffered freely to cultivate their natural advantages, a virtual equality of contribution will come in its own time, and will flow by an  
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easy descent, through its own proper and natural channels. An attempt to disturb that course, and to force nature, will only bring on universal discontent, distress and confusion.

You tell me, Sir, that you prefer an union with Ireland to the little regulations which are proposed in Parliament. This union is a great question of state, to which, when it comes properly before me in my parliamentary capacity, I shall give an honest and unprejudiced consideration. However, it is a settled rule with me, to make the most of my *actual situation*; and not to refuse to do a proper thing, because there is something else more proper, which I am not able to do. This union is a business of difficulty; and on the principles of your letter, a business impracticable. Until it can be matured into a feasible and desirable scheme, I wish to have as  
close



close an union of interest and affection with Ireland, as I can have ; and that, I am sure, is a far better thing than any nominal union of government.

France, and indeed most extensive empires, which by various designs and fortunes have grown into one great mass, contain many Provinces that are very different from each other in privileges and modes of government ; and they raise their supplies in different ways ; in different proportions ; and under different authorities ; yet none of them are for this reason, curtailed of their natural rights ; but they carry on trade and manufactures with perfect equality. In some way or other the true balance is found ; and all of them are properly poised and harmonised. How much have you lost by the participation of Scotland in all your commerce ? The external trade of England has more than doubled  
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since that period ; and I believe your internal (which is the most advantageous) has been augmented at least four-fold. Such virtue there is in liberality of sentiment, that you have grown richer even by the partnership of poverty.

If you think, that this participation was a loss, commercially considered, but that it has been compensated by the share which Scotland has taken in defraying the public charge—I believe you have not very carefully looked at the public accounts. Ireland, Sir, pays a great deal more than Scotland ; and is perhaps as much, and as effectually united to England as Scotland is. But if Scotland, instead of paying little, had paid nothing at all, we should be gainers, not losers by acquiring the hearty co-operation of an active intelligent people, towards the increase of the common stock ; instead of our being employed in watch-  
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ing and counteracting them, and their being employed in watching and counteracting us, with the peevish and churlish jealousy of rivals and enemies on both sides.

I am sure, Sir, that the commercial experience of the merchants of Bristol, will soon disabuse them of the prejudice, that they can trade no longer, if countries more lightly taxed, are permitted to deal in the same commodities at the same markets. You know, that in fact, you trade very largely where you are met by the goods of all nations. You even pay high duties, on the import of your goods, and afterwards undersell nations less taxed, at their own markets; and where goods of the same kind are not charged at all. If it were otherwise, you could trade very little. You know, that the price of all sorts of manufacture is not a great deal in-

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hanced, (except to the domestic consumer) by any taxes paid in this country. This I might very easily prove.

The same consideration will relieve you from the apprehension you express, with relation to sugars, and the difference of the duties paid here and in Ireland. Those duties affect the interior consumer only; and for obvious reasons, relative to the interest of revenue itself, they must be proportioned to his ability of payment; but in all cases in which sugar can be an *object of commerce*, and therefore (in this view) of rivalry, you are sensible, that you are at least on a par with Ireland. As to your apprehensions concerning the more advantageous situation of Ireland, for some branches of commerce, (for it is so but for some) I trust you will not find them more serious. Millford Haven, which is at your door, may serve to shew you,

that the mere advantage of ports is not the thing which shifts the seat of commerce from one part of the world to the other. If I thought you inclined to take up this matter on local considerations, I should state to you, that I do not know any part of the kingdom so well situated for an advantageous commerce with Ireland as Bristol; and that none would be so likely to profit of its prosperity as our city. But your profit and theirs must concur. Beggary and bankruptcy are not the circumstances which invite to an intercourse with that or with any country; and I believe it will be found invariably true, that the superfluities of a rich nation furnish a better object of trade than the necessities of a poor one. It is the interest of the commercial world that wealth should be found every where.

The true ground of fear, in my opinion is this ; that Ireland, from the vicious system of its internal polity, will be a long time before it can derive any benefit from the liberty now granted, or from any thing else. But as I do not vote advantages, in hopes that they may not be enjoyed, I will not lay any stress upon this consideration. I rather wish, that the Parliament of Ireland may, in its own wisdom, remove these impediments, and put their country in a condition to avail itself of its natural advantages. If they do not, the fault is with them, and not with us.

I have written this long letter, in order to give all possible satisfaction to my constituents with regard to the part I have taken in this affair. It gave me inexpressible concern to find, that my conduct had been a cause of uneasiness to any of them. Next to my honour

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and conscience, I have nothing so near and dear to me as their approbation. However, I had much rather run the risque of displeasing than of injuring them ;—if I am driven to make such an option. You obligingly lament, that you are not to have me for your advocate ; but if I had been capable of acting as an advocate in opposition to a plan so perfectly consonant to my known principles, and to the opinions I had publicly declared on an hundred occasions, I should only disgrace myself, without supporting with the smallest degree of credit or effect, the cause you wished me to undertake. I should have lost the only thing which can make such abilities as mine of any use to the world now or hereafter ; I mean that authority which is derived from an opinion, that a member speaks the language of truth and sincerity ; and that he is not  
ready

ready to take up or lay down a great political system for the convenience of the hour; that he is in parliament to support his opinion of the public good, and does not form his opinion in order to get into parliament, or to continue in it. It is in a great measure for your sake, that I wish to preserve this character. Without it, I am sure, I should be ill able to discharge, by any service, the smallest part of that debt of gratitude and affection, which I owe you for the great and honourable trust you have reposed in me. I am, with the highest regard and esteem,

S I R,

Your most obedient

Beaconsfield,  
23d April, 1778.

And humble Servant,

E. B.



[ 20 ]

C O P Y  
O F A  
L E T T E R  
T O

Mess. \*\*\*\*\* and Co. Bristol.

GENTLEMEN,

**I**T gives me the most sensible concern to find, that my vote on the resolutions relative to the trade of Ireland, has not been fortunate enough to meet with your approbation. I have explained at large the grounds of my conduct on that occasion in my letters to the Merchants Hall: but my very sincere regard and esteem for you will not permit me to let the matter pass without an explanation, which is particular to yourselves, and which, I hope, will prove satisfactory to you.

You

You tell me, that the conduct of your late member is not much wondered at ; but you seem to be at a loss to account for mine ; and you lament, that I have taken so decided a part *against* my constituents.

This is rather an heavy imputation. Does it then really appear to you, that the propositions, to which you refer, are, on the face of them, so manifestly wrong, and so certainly injurious to the trade and manufactures of Great Britain, and particularly to yours, that no man could think of proposing, or supporting them, except from resentment to you, or from some other oblique motive ? If you suppose your late member, or if you suppose me, to act upon other reasons than we choose to avow, to what do you attribute the conduct of the *other* members, who in the beginning almost unanimously adopted those

resolutions? To what do you attribute the strong part taken by the ministers, and along with the ministers, by several of their most declared opponents? This does not indicate a ministerial job; a party design; or a provincial or local purpose. It is therefore not so absolutely clear, that the measure is wrong, or likely to be injurious to the true interests of any place, or any person.

The reason, gentlemen, for taking this step, at this time, is but too obvious and too urgent. I cannot imagine, that you forget the great war, which has been carried on with so little success (and, as I thought, with so little policy) in America; or that you are not aware of the other great wars which are impending. Ireland has been called upon to repel the attacks of enemies of no small power, brought upon her by councils,

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cils, in which she has had no share. The very purpose and declared object of that original war, which has brought other wars, and other enemies on Ireland, was not very flattering to her dignity, her interest, or to the very principle of her liberty. Yet she submitted patiently to the evils she suffered from an attempt to subdue to *your* obedience, countries whose very commerce was not open to her. America was to be conquered, in order that Ireland should *not* trade thither ; whilst the miserable trade which she is permitted to carry on to other places has been torn to pieces in the struggle. In this situation, are we neither to suffer her to have any real interest in our quarrel, or to be flattered with the hope of any future means of bearing the burthens which she is to incur in defending herself against enemies which we have brought upon her ?

I cannot set my face against such arguments. Is it quite fair to suppose, that I have no other motive for yielding to them, but a desire of acting *against* my constituents? It is for *you*, and for *your* interest, as a dear, cherished, and respected part of a valuable whole, that I have taken my share in this question. You do not, you cannot suffer by it. If honesty be true policy with regard to the transient interest of individuals, it is much more certainly so with regard to the permanent interests of communities. I know, that it is but too natural for us to see our own *certain* ruin, in the *possible* prosperity of other people. It is hard to persuade us, that every thing which is *got* by another is not *taken* from ourselves. But it is fit, that we should get the better of these suggestions, which come from what is not the best and soundest  
part

part of our nature, and that we should form to ourselves a way of thinking, more rational, more just, and more religious. Trade is not a limited thing ; as if the objects of mutual demand and consumption, could not stretch beyond the bounds of our jealousies. God has given the earth to the children of men, and he has undoubtedly, in giving it to them, given them what is abundantly sufficient for all their exigencies ; not a scanty, but a most liberal provision for them all. The Author of our nature has written it strongly in that nature, and has promulgated the same law in his written word, that man shall eat his bread by his labour ; and I am persuaded, that no man, and no combination of men, for their own ideas of their particular profit, can, without great impiety, undertake to say, that he *shall not* do so ; that they have no  
 sort

fort of right, either to prevent the labour, or to withhold the bread. Ireland having received no *compensation*, directly or indirectly, for any restraints on their trade, ought not, in justice or common honesty, be made subject to such restraints. I do not mean to impeach the right of the parliament of Great Britain, to make laws for the trade of Ireland. I only speak of what laws it is right for Parliament to make.

It is nothing to an oppressed people, to say that in part they are protected at our charge. The military force which shall be kept up in order to cramp the natural faculties of a people, and to prevent their arrival to their utmost prosperity, is the instrument of their servitude not the means of their protection. To protect men, is to forward, and not to restrain their improvement. Else, what is it more, than to avow to them,  
and

and to the world, that you guard them from others, only to make them a prey to yourself. This fundamental nature of protection does not belong to free, but to all governments; and is as valid in Turkey as in Great Britain. No government ought to own that it exists for the purpose of checking the prosperity of its people, or that there is such a principle involved in its policy.

Under the impresson of these sentiments, (and not as wanting every attention to my constituents, which affection and gratitude could inspire,) I voted for these bills which give you so much trouble. I voted for them, not as doing complete justice to Ireland, but as being something less unjust than the general prohibition which has hitherto prevailed. I hear some discourse, as if in one or two paltry duties on materials, Ireland had a preference; and that  
those



those who set themselves against this act of scanty justice, assert that they are only contending for an *equality*. What equality? Do they forget, that the whole woollen manufacture of Ireland, the most extensive and profitable of any, and the natural staple of that kingdom, has been in a manner so destroyed by restrictive laws of ours, and (at our persuasion, and on our promises) by restrictive laws of *their own*, that in a few years, it is probable, they will not be able to wear a coat of their own fabric. Is this equality? Do gentlemen forget, that the understood faith upon which they were persuaded to such an unnatural act, has not been kept; but a linen-manufacture has been set up, and highly encouraged, against them? Is this equality? Do they forget the state of the trade of Ireland in beer, so great an article of consumption,

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and which now stands in so mischievous a position with regard to their revenue, their manufacture, and their agriculture? Do they find any equality in all this? Yet if the least step is taken towards doing them common justice in the lightest articles for the most limited markets, a cry is raised, as if we were going to be ruined by partiality to Ireland.

Gentlemen, I know that the deficiency in these arguments is made up (not by you, but by others) by the usual resource on such occasions, the confidence in military force, and superior power. But that ground of confidence, which at no time was perfectly just, or the avowal of it tolerably decent, is at this time very unseasonable. Late experience has shewn, that it cannot be altogether relied upon; and many, if not all our present difficulties, have  
arisen

arisen from putting our trust in what may very possibly fail; and if it should fail, leaves those who are hurt by such a reliance, without pity. Whereas honesty and justice, reason and equity, go a very great way in securing prosperity to those who use them; and in case of failure, secure the best retreat, and the most honourable consolations.

It is very unfortunate, that we should consider those as rivals, whom we ought to regard as fellow-labourers in a common cause. Ireland has never made a single step in its progress towards prosperity, by which you have not had a share, and perhaps the greatest share, in the benefit. That progress has been chiefly owing to her own natural advantages, and her own efforts, which, after a long time, and by slow degrees, have prevailed in some measure over the mischievous systems which have been adopted.

opted. Far enough she is still from having arrived even at an ordinary state of perfection; and if our jealousies were to be converted into politics, as systematically as some would have them, the trade of Ireland would vanish out of the system of commerce. But, believe me, if Ireland is beneficial to you, it is so not from the parts in which it is restrained, but from those in which it is left free, though not left unrivalled. The greater its freedom, the greater must be your advantage. If you should lose in one way, you will gain in twenty.

Whilst I remain under this unalterable and powerful conviction, you will not wonder at the *decided* part I take. It is my custom so to do, when I see my way clearly before me; and when I know, that I am not misled by any passion, or any personal interest; which in this case, I am very sure, I am not. I  
find

find that disagreeable things are circulated among my constituents; and I wish my sentiments, which form my justification, may be equally general with the circulation against me. I have the honour to be, with the greatest regard and esteem,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient

Westminster

May 2, 1778.

and humble servant,

E. B.

I send the bills.