

A LETTER
TO
THE REVEREND DR. FREE.

TULLAMORE, *May 2, 1758.*

REVEREND SIR,

1. A LITTLE tract appearing under your name was yesterday put into my hands. You therein call upon me to speak, if I have any exceptions to make to what is advanced: and promise to reply as fairly and candidly as I can expect, "provided those exceptions be drawn up, as you have set the example, in a short compass, and in the manner wherein all wise and good people would choose to manage a religious dispute." (Page 22.)

2. "In a short compass," Sir, they will certainly be drawn up, for my own sake as well as yours: For I know the value of time, and would gladly employ it all in what more immediately relates to eternity. But I do not promise to draw them up in that manner whereof you have set the example. I cannot, I dare not; for I fear God, and do really believe there is a judgment to come. Therefore, I dare not "return evil for evil," neither "railing for railing." Nor can I allow that your manner of treating this subject is that "wherein all wise and good people would choose to manage a religious dispute." Far, very far, from it. I shall rejoice if a little more fairness and candour should appear in your future writings. But I cannot expect it; for the *nigra succus loliginis*, "wormwood and gall," seem to have infected your very vitals.

3. The quotation from Bishop Gibson, which takes up five out of nineteen pages, I have answered already;* and in a manner wherewith I have good reason to believe his Lordship was entirely satisfied. With his Lordship, therefore, I have no present concern; my business now is with you only: And seeing you are "now ready," as you express it, "to run a tilt," I must make what defence I can. Only you must excuse me from meeting you on the same ground, or fighting you with the same

* In "A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London."

weapons: My weapons are only truth and love. May the God of truth and love strengthen my weakness!

4. I wave what relates to Mr. V——'s personal character, which is too well known to need my defence of it; as likewise the occurrence (real or imaginary I cannot tell) which gave birth to your performance. All that I concern myself with is your five vehement assertions with regard to the people called Methodists. These I shall consider in their order, and prove to be totally false and groundless.

5. The first is this: "Their whole ministry is an open and avowed opposition to one of the fundamental articles of our religion." (Page 4.) How so? Why, "the Twentieth Article declares, we may not so expound one scripture, that it be repugnant to another. And yet it is notorious, that the Methodists do ever explain the word 'faith' as it stands in some of St. Paul's writings, so as to make his doctrine a direct and flat contradiction to that of St. James." (Page 5.)

This stale objection has been answered an hundred times, so that I really thought we should have heard no more of it. But since it is required, I repeat the answer once more: By *faith* we mean "the evidence of things not seen;" by *justifying faith*, a divine evidence or conviction, that "Christ loved me, and gave himself for me." St. Paul affirms, that a man is justified by this faith; which St. James never denies, but only asserts, that a man cannot be justified by a dead faith: And this St. Paul never affirms.

"But St. James declares, 'Faith without works is dead.' Therefore it is clearly St. James's meaning, that a faith which is without virtue and morality cannot produce salvation. Yet the Methodists so explain St. Paul, as to affirm that faith without virtue or morality will produce salvation." (Page 6.) Where? in which of their writings? This needs some proof: I absolutely deny the fact. So that all which follows is mere flourish, and falls to the ground at once; and all that you aver of their "open and scandalous opposition to the Twentieth Article" (*ibid.*) is no better than open and scandalous slander.

6. Your Second assertion is this: "The Methodist, for the perdition of the souls of his followers, openly gives our Saviour the lie, loads the Scripture with falsehood and contradiction;" (and pray what could a Mahometan, or infidel, or the devil himself do more?) "yea, openly blasphemes the name of

Christ, by saying that the works of men are of no consideration at all ; that God makes no distinction between virtue and vice, that he does not hate vice or love virtue. What blasphemy then and impiety are those wretches guilty of who, in their diabolical frenzy, dare to contradict our Saviour's authority, and that in such an essential article of religion ! ” (Pages 7–9.) Here also the Methodists plead, Not Guilty, and require you to produce your evidence ; to show in which of their writings they affirm that God “ will not reward every man according to his works ; that he makes no distinction between virtue and vice ; that he does not hate vice or love virtue.” These are positions which they never remember to have advanced. If you can, refresh their memory.

7. You assert, Thirdly, the Methodists, by these positions, “ destroy the essential attributes of God, and ruin his character as Judge of the world.” Very true ; if they held these positions. But here lies the mistake. They hold no such positions. They never did. They detest and abhor them. In arguing, therefore, on this supposition, you are again “ beating the air.”

8. You assert, Fourthly, the Methodists “ teach and propagate downright Atheism,—a capital crime ; and Atheists in some countries have been put to death. Hereby they make room for all manner of vice and villany ; by which means the bands of society are dissolved. And therefore this attempt must be considered as a sort of treason by Magistrates.” (Pages 10, 11.)

Again we deny the whole charge, and call for proof ; and, blessed be God, so do the Magistrates in Great Britain. Bold, vehement asseverations will not pass upon them for legal evidence : Nor indeed on any reasonable men. They can distinguish between *arguing* and *calling names* : The former becomes a gentleman and a Christian : But what is he who can be guilty of the latter ?

9. You assert, Lastly, that any who choose a Methodist Clergyman for their Lecturer, “ put into that office, which should be held by a Minister of the Church of England, an enemy, who undermines not only the legal establishment of that Church, but also the foundation of all religion.” (Page 13.)

Once more we must call upon you for the proof ; the proof of these two particulars, First, that I, John Wesley, am “ an enemy to the Church ; and that I undermine not only the legal establishment of the Church of England, but also the very foun-

dation of all religion." Secondly. That "Mr. V— is an enemy to the Church, and is undermining all religion, as well as the establishment."

10. Another word, and I have done: Are there "certain qualifications required of all Lecturers, before they are by law permitted to speak to the people?" (Page 14.) And is a subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles of religion one of these qualifications? And is a person who does not "conform to such subscription" disqualified to be a Lecturer? or, who "has ever held or published anything contrary to what the Church of England maintains?" Then certainly you, Dr. John Free, are not "permitted by law to speak to the people;" neither are you "qualified to be a Lecturer" in any church in London or England, as by law established. For you flatly deny and openly oppose more than one or two of those Articles. You do not in anywise conform to the subscription you made before you was ordained either Priest or Deacon. You both hold and publish (if you are the author and publisher of the tract before me) what is grossly, palpably "contrary to what the Church of England maintains," in her Homilies as well as Articles; those Homilies to which you have also subscribed, in subscribing the Thirty-sixth Article. You have subscribed them, Sir; but did you ever read them? Did you ever read so much as the three first Homilies? I beg of you, Sir, to read these at least, before you write again about the doctrine of the Church of England. And would it not be prudent to read a few of the writings of the Methodists before you undertake a farther confutation of them? At present you know not the men, or their communication. You are as wholly unacquainted both with them and their doctrines, as if you had lived all your days in the islands of Japan, or the deserts of Arabia. You have given a furious assault to you know not whom; and you have done it, you know not why. You have not hurt me thereby; but you have hurt yourself, perhaps in your character, certainly in your conscience. For this is not doing to others "as you would they should do unto you." When you grow cool, I trust you will see this clearly; and will no more accuse, in a manner so remote from fairness and candour,

Reverend Sir,

Your servant for Christ's sake,

JOHN WESLEY.