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Wesley. Letter to a Friend  
concerning Tea. 1825

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A  
**LETTER**  
TO A  
**FRIEND,**  
CONCERNING  
**TEA.**

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*Homo sum : Humani nihil à me alienum puto.*

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By **JOHN WESLEY, M.A.**

Fellow of *Lincoln-College*, OXFORD.

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*The following Letter is printed VERBATIM  
from the first Edition, published in 1748.*

A

## LETTER

TO A

FRIEND, &amp;c.

*Newington, Dec. 10, 1748.*

DEAR SIR,

1. **I** Have read your Letter with Attention, and much approve of the Spirit with which it is wrote. You speak in Love. I desire to do so too; and then no Harm can be done on either Side. You appear not to be wedded to your own Opinion, but open to further Conviction. I would willingly be of the same Temper; not obstinately attached to either Side of the Question. I am clearly satisfied of the Necessity of this; a Willingness to see what as yet I see not. For I know, an Unwillingness to be convinced, would utterly blind either you or me: And that if we are *resolved* to retain our present Opinion, Reason and Argument signify nothing.

2. I shall not therefore think it is Time or Pains misemployed, to give the whole Cause a second Hearing: To recite the Occasion of every Step I have taken, and the Motives inducing me so to do: And then to consider, whatsoever either you or others have urged, on the contrary Side of the Question.

3. Twenty-nine Years, when I had spent a few Months at Oxford, having as I apprehended, an exceeding good Constitution, and being otherwise in Health, I was a little surprised at some Symptoms of a Paralytick Disorder. I could not imagine,

what should occasion that shaking of my Hand ; till I observed it was always worst after Breakfast, and that if I intermitted drinking Tea for two or three Days, it did not shake at all. Upon Inquiry, I found Tea had the same Effect upon others also of my Acquaintance ; and therefore saw, that this was one of its natural Effects (as several Physicians have often remarked) especially, when it is largely and frequently drank ; and most of all on Persons of weak Nerves. Upon this I lessened the Quantity, drank it weaker, and added more Milk and Sugar. But still for above six and twenty Years, I was more or less subject to the same Disorder.

4. *July* was two Years, I began to observe, that abundance of the People in *London*, with whom I conversed, laboured under the same, and many other Paralytick Disorders, and that in a much higher Degree ; insomuch that some of their Nerves were quite unstrung ; their bodily Strength was quite decay'd, and they could not go through their daily Labour. I inquired, "Are you not an hard Drinker?" And was answered by one and another, and another, "No, indeed, Sir, not I ; I drink scarce any Thing but a little Tea, Morning and Night." I immediately remembered my own Case ; and after weighing the Matter throughly, easily gathered from many concurring Circumstances, that it was the same Case with them.

5. I considered, "What an Advantage would it be, to these poor enfeebled People, if they would leave off what so manifestly impairs their Health, and thereby hurts their Business also ?— Is there Nothing equally cheap which they could use ? Yes, surely : And cheaper too. If they used *English Herbs* in its stead, (which would cost either Nothing, or what is next to Nothing) with the same Bread, Butter, and Milk, they would save just the Price of the Tea. And hereby they might not only lessen their Pain, but in some Degree their Poverty too. For they would  
" be able

“ be able to work (as well as to save) considerably  
 “ more than they can do now. And by this Means,  
 “ if they are in Debt, they might be more just,  
 “ paying away what they either earued or saved.  
 “ If they are not in Debt, they might be more mer-  
 “ ciful, giving it away to them that want.”

6. I considered farther, “ What an Advantage  
 “ might this be, particularly in such a Body of Men  
 “ as those are, who are united together in these  
 “ Societies ? Who are both so numerous, and so  
 “ poor ? How much might be saved in so numerous  
 “ a Body, even in this single Article of Expense ?  
 “ And how greatly is all that can possibly be saved,  
 “ in every Article, wanted daily, by those who have  
 “ not even Food convenient for them ?”

7. I soon perceived, that this latter Consideration  
 was of a more general Nature than the former : And  
 that it affected many of those, whom the other did  
 not so immediately concern : Seeing it was as need-  
 ful for *All* to save fruitless Expences, as for some  
 to regain the Health they had impaired. Especially,  
 considered as Members of a Society, the Wants of  
 which they could not be unapprized of : They knew  
 of those to whom they were so peculiarly united,  
 some had not Food to sustain Nature : Some were  
 destitute of even necessary Cloathing : Some had  
 not where to lay their Head : They knew, or might  
 know, that the little Contributions made weekly,  
 did in no wise suffice to remove these Wants, being  
 barely sufficient to relieve the Sick : And even that,  
 in so scanty a Manner, that I know not, if some of  
 them have not, with their Allowance, pined away,  
 and at length died for Want. If you and I have not  
 saved all we could to relieve these, How shall we  
 face them at the Throne of GOD ?

8. I reflected, “ If one only would save all that  
 “ he could, in this single Instance, he might surely  
 “ feed or cloath one of his Brethren, and, perhaps,  
 “ save one Life. What then might be done, if ten  
 “ thousand, or one thousand, or only five hundred  
 “ would do it ?” Yea, if half that Number should



say, "I will compute this Day what I have expended in Tea, weekly or yearly. I will immediately enter on cheaper Food. And whatever is saved hereby, I will put into that Poor-box weekly, to feed the Hungry, and to cloath the Naked." I am mistaken, if any among us need want, either Food or Raiment from that Hour.

9. I thought farther, "'Tis said, nay, many tell me to my Face, I can persnade this People to any Thing. I will make a fair Trial. If I cannot persuade them, there may be some good Effect. All who do not wilfully shut their Eyes will see, that I have no such Influence as they supposed. If I can persuade any Number; many who are now weak or sick, will be restored to Health and Strength. Many will pay those Debts, which others, perhaps equally poor, can but ill afford to lose. Many will be less straitened in their own Families. Many by helping their Neighbour, will lay up for themselves Treasures in Heaven."

10. Immediately it struck into my Mind, "But Example must go before Precept. Therefore I must not plead an Exemption for myself, from a daily Practice of twenty-seven Years. I must begin." I did so. I left it off myself in *August, 1746*. And I have now had sufficient Time to try the Effects, which have fully answered my Expectation: My Paralytick Complaints are all gone: My Hand is as steady as it was at Fifteen: Although I must expect that, or other Weaknesses, soon; as I decline into the Vale of Years. And so considerable a Difference do I find in my Expeuce, that I can make it appear, from the Accounts now in being, in only those four Families at *London, Bristol, Kingswood and Newcastle*, I save upwards of fifty Pounds a Year.

11. The first to whom I explained these Things at large, and whom I advised to set the same Example to their Brethren, were, a few of those, who rejoice to assist my Brother and me, as our Sons in the Gospel. A Week after I proposed it to about  
forty

forty of those, whom I believed to be strong in Faith : And the next Morning to about sixty more, intreating them all, to speak their Minds freely. They did so : And in the End, saw the Good which might issue ; yielded to the Force of Scripture and Reason : And resolved all (but two or three) by the Grace of GOD, to make the Trial without Delay.

12. In a short Time, I proposed it, but with all the Tenderness I could, first, To the Body of those who are supposed to have living Faith, and after staying a few Days, (that I might judge the better how to speak) to the whole Society. It soon appeared (as I doubted not but it would) how far these were from *calling me Rabbi* ; from submitting implicitly to my Judgment, or implicitly following my Example. Objections rose in abundance from all Sides. These I now proceed to consider : Whether they are advanced by you, or by others, and whether pointed at the Premisses, or directly at the Conclusion.

13. I. Some objected, “ Tea is not unwholesome at all ; not in any Kind prejudicial to Health.”

To these I reply, First, You should not be so sure of this. Even that casual Circumstance, related in *Dr. Short's History* of it, might incline you to doubt, *viz.* That “ while the *Chinese* dry the Leaves, and turn it with their Hands upon the Tiu-plates, the Moisture of them is so extremely corrosive, that it eats into the Flesh, if not wiped off immediately.” It is not probable then, that what remains in the Leaves is quite friendly to the human Body.

Secondly, Many eminent Physicians have declared their Judgment, That it is prejudicial in several Respects : That it gives Rise to numberless Disorders, particularly those of the nervous Kind : And that, if frequently used by those of weak Nerves, it is no other than a slow Poison.

Thirdly, If all Physicians were silent in the Case, yet plain Fact is against you. And this speaks loud enough. It *was* prejudicial to *my* Health : It *is* so to many at this Day.

14. “ But

14. " But it is not so to *me*," says the Objector, " Why then should I leave it off ?"

I answer, First, To give an Example to those to whom it is undeniably prejudicial.

Secondly, That you may have the more wherewith to give Bread to the Hungry, and Raiment to the Naked.

15. " But I cannot leave it off ; for it helps my Health. Nothing else will agree with me."

I answer, First, Will *Nothing* else agree with you ? I know not how to believe that. I suppose your Body is much of the same Kind with that of your Great Grandmother. And do you think nothing else agreed with her ? Or with any of her Progenitors ? What poor, puling, sickly Things, must all the *English* then have been, till within these hundred Years ! But you know they were not so. Other Things agreed with them. And why not with you ?

Secondly, If in Fact nothing else will, if Tea has already weakened your Stomach, and impaired your Digestion to such a Degree, it *has* hurt you more than you are aware ; it has prejudiced *your* Health extremely. You have need to abhor it as deadly Poison, and to renounce it from this very Hour.

So says a Drinker of Drams, " Nothing else will agree with me. Nothing else will raise my Spirits. " I can digest Nothing without." Indeed ? Is it so ? Then touch no more, if you love your Life.

Thirdly, Suppose nothing else agrees with you at first ; yet in a While many Things will. When I first left off Tea, I was half asleep all Day long : My Head aked from Morning to Night : I could not remember a Question asked, even till I could return an Answer. But in a Week's Time all these inconveniences were gone, and have never returned since.

Fourthly, I have not found one single Exception yet : Not one Person in all *England*, with whom, after sufficient Trial made, *nothing else* would agree.

It is therefore well worth While for *you* to try again ;

again; if you have any true Regard for your own Health, or any Compassion for those who are perishing all around you, for want of the common Necessaries of Life.

16. If you are sincere in this Plea; if you do not *talk* of your Health, while the real Objection is your Inclination, make a fair Trial thus, 1. Take half a Pint of Milk every Morning, with a little Bread, not boiled, but warmed only; (a Man in tolerable Health might double the Quantity.) 2. If this is too heavy, add as much Water, and boil it together with a Spoonful of Oatmeal. 3. If this agrees not, try half a Pint, or a little more, of Water-gruel, neither thick nor thin; not sweetened (for that may be apt to make you sick) but with a very little Butter, Salt, and Bread. 4. If this disagrees, try Sage, green Balm, Mint, or Pennyroyal Tea, infusing only so much of the Herb as just to change the Colour of the Water. 5. Try two or three of these mixed, in various Proportions. 6. Try ten or twelve other *English* Herbs. 7. Try *Foltron*, a Mixture of Herbs to be had at many Grocers, far healthier as well as cheaper than Tea. 8. Try Coco. If after having tried each of these, for a Week or ten Days, you find none of them will agree with your Constitution, then use (weak Green) Tea again: But at the same Time know, That your having used it so long, has brought you near the Chambers of Death.

17. II. "I do not know, says another, but Tea may hurt me. But there is nothing saved by leaving it off: For I am sure other Things cost full as much." I pray, what other Things? Sack and Sugar costs more; and so do Ragouts, or Pheasants, or Ortolans. But what is this to the Point? We don't say, *all* Things are cheaper. But any of the Things above-mentioned are; at least if prudently managed. Therefore, if you really desire to save what you can, you will drink Tea no more.

18. "Well, I don't design to buy any more myself; but where others drink it, there is nothing saved by my abstaining." I answer, First, Yes, something

something is saved, though but little; especially if you tell them before, I shall not drink Tea. And many a Little, you know, put together, will make a great Sum.

Secondly, If the whole saved were ever so little, if it were but two Mites, when you save this for GOD and your Brethren's Sake, it is much.

Thirdly, Your Example in saving a little now, may occasion the saving of more by and by.

Fourthly, It is not a little Advantage which you may reap, even now, to your own Soul: By habituating yourself not to be ashamed of being singular in a good Thing: By taking up your Cross and denying yourself, even in so small an Instance, and by accustoming yourself, to act on rational Grounds, whether in a little Matter or a great.

19. "But what is saved, will be no better employed." Do you say this with Regard to yourself, or others? If with Regard to yourself, it will be *your* Fault, if you don't employ it better. I don't say you *will*, but I am sure you *may*. And if you *do* not, 'tis your own Sin, and your own Shame.

If with Regard to others, How do you know that it will not be employed better? I trust it will. It cannot be denied, that it often *has*, and that it always *may*, be. And it is highly probable, all who save any Thing from the best Motive, will lay it out to the best Purpose.

20. "As to Example," you say, "I have lately been without Hopes of doing any Good by it." I suppose you mean, because so exceeding few will follow either your Example or mine, I am sorry for it. This only gives me a fresh Objection to this unwholesome, expensive Food, *viz.* That it has too much Hold on the Hearts of them that use it: That (to use a Scriptural Phrase) they are *under the Power* of this Trifle. If it be so, were there no other Reason than this, they ought to throw it away at once. Else they no more regard St. Paul than they do you or me: For his Rule is home to the Point. *All Things are lawful for me: But I will*

*I will not be brought under the Power of any.* Away with it then, however lawful, (that is, though it were wholesome as well as cheap,) if you are already brought *under the Power of it.*

And the fewer they are who follow this Rule, the greater Reason there is, that you should add one Example more to those few. Though, blessed be GOD, they are not so few as you suppose. I have met with very many in *London*, who use less of it, than they had done for many Years; and above an hundred, who have plucked out the Right Eye, and cast it from them; who wholly abstain from it.

21. You add, But I am “equally, yea abundantly more, concerned to set an Example, in all Christian Behaviour.” I grant it: This therefore *ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

22. But, “one Day, you add, I saw your Brother drink Tea, which he said was for fear of giving Offence.”

I answer, First, Learn from hence to follow neither his, nor my Practice implicitly: But weigh the Reason of each, and then follow Reason, where-soever it stands. But,

Secondly, Examine your Heart, and beware Inclination does not put on the Shape of Reason.

Thirdly, You see with your own Eyes, I do not drink it at all, and yet I seldom give Offence thereby. It is not then the bare abstaining, but the Manner of doing it, which usually gives the Offence.

Fourthly, There is therefore a *Manner* wherein you may do it too, and yet give no more Offence than I. For instance, If any ask you; simply reply, “I don’t drink Tea: I never use it.” If they say, “Why you *did* drink it?” Answer, “I did so; but I have left it off a considerable Time.” Those who have either Good-nature or Good-manners will say no more. But if any should impertinently add, “O but why did you leave it off?” Answer mildly, “Because I thought Water-gruel (suppose) was wholesomer, as well as cheaper.” If they (with still

still greater Ill-manners and Impertinence) go on, "What! you do it because Mr. *Wesley* bids you." Reply calmly, "True; I do it because Mr. *Wesley* on good Reasons advises me so to do." If they add the trite cant Phrase, "What, you *follow Man!*" Reply, without any Emotion, "Yes; I follow any Man, you or him, or any other, who gives me good Reasons for so doing." If they persist in Cavilling, close the whole Matter with, "I neither drink it, nor dispute about it."

23. If you proceed in this Manner, with Mildness and Love, exceeding few will be offended. "But you ought, say some, to give up an indifferent Thing, rather than give an Offence to any." So St. *Paul*, *I will eat no Flesh whilst the World standeth, lest I make my Brother to offend.*" I reply, This is not an indifferent Thing, if it affects the Health either of myself or my Brethren. Therefore that Rule, relating wholly to Things indifferent, is not applicable to this Case. Would St. *Paul* have said, I will drink Drams while the world standeth, lest I make my Brother to offend? "But Tea is not so hurtful as Drams." I do not believe it is. But it is hurtful. And that is enough. The Question does not turn on the *Degree* of Hurtfulness. "However, it is but a *small* Thing." Nay, nothing is small if it touches Conscience. Much less is it a small Thing, to preserve my own or my Brother's Health, or to be a faithful Steward even of the Mammon of Unrighteousness. O think it not a small Thing, whether only one for whom Christ died, be fed or hungry, be cloathed or naked.

To conclude the Head of Offence. You must at least allow, that all this is no Plea at all for your drinking Tea at home. "Yes it is; for my Husband or Parents are offended, if I do not drink it." I answer, First, Perhaps this, in some rare Cases, may be a sufficient Reason, why a Wife or a Child should use this Food, that is, with them; but no where else. But, Secondly, Try, and not once or twice only, if you can't overcome that Offence

fence by Reason, Softness, Love, Patience, Long-suffering, joined with constant and fervent Prayer.

24. Your next Objection is, "I can't bear to give Trouble: Therefore I drink whatever others drink where I come, else there is so much Hurry about insignificant me." I answer,

First, This is no plea at all, for your drinking Tea at home. Therefore touch it not there, whatever you do abroad.

Secondly, Where is the trouble given, even when you are abroad, if they drink Tea, and you fill your Cup with Milk and Water?

Thirdly, Whatever Trouble is taken, is not for "insignificant *me*," but for that poor Man, who is half-starved with Cold and Hunger: for that miserable Woman, who, while she is poisoning herself, wipes her Mouth, and says she does no Evil: Who will not believe the Poison will hurt *her*, because it does not (sensibly at least) hurt *you*. O throw it away! Let her have one Plea less, for destroying her Body, (if not her Soul,) before the Time!

25. You object farther, "It is my Desire to be unknown for any Particularity, unless a peculiar Love to the Souls of those who are present."—And I hope, to the Souls of the absent too; yea, and to their Bodies also in a due Proportion, that they may be healthy, and fed, and cloathed, and warm, and may praise GOD for the Consolation.

26. You subjoin, "When I had left it off for some Months, I was continually puzzled with Why? What? &c. And I have seen no good Effects, but impertinent Questions and Answers, and unedifying Conversation about Eating and Drinking."

I answer, First, Those who were so uneasy about it plainly shewed, that you touched the Apple of their Eye. Consequently these, of all others, ought to leave it off; for they are evidently *brought under the Power of it*.

Secondly, Those impertinent Questions might have



have been cut short, by a very little Steadiness and common Sense. You need only have taken the Method mentioned above, and they would have dropped in the Midst.

Thirdly, It is not strange you saw no good Effects of leaving it off, where it was not left off at all. But you saw very bad Effects of not leaving it off, viz. The adding Sin to Sin: The joining much unedifying Conversation to wasteful, unhealthy Self-indulgence.

Fourthly, You need not go far to see many good Effects of leaving it off: You may see them in me. I have recovered hereby that healthy State of the whole nervous System, which I had in a great Degree, and I almost thought irrecoverably, lost, for considerably more than twenty Years. I have been enabled hereby to assist in one Year above fifty Poor with Food or Raiment, whom I must otherwise have left (for I had before begged for them all I could) as hungry and naked as I found them. You may see the good Effects in above thirty poor People just now before you, who have been restored to Health, thro' the Medicines bought by that Money which a single Person has saved in this Article. And a thousand more good Effects you will not fail to see, when her Example is more generally followed.

27. Neither is there any need that Conversation should be unedifying, even when it turns upon Eating and Drinking. Nay, from such a Conversation, if duly improved, numberless good Effects may flow. For how few understand, *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the Glory of God?*— And how glad ought you to be, of a fair Occasion to observe, that though the Kingdom of GOD does not consist in *Meats and Drinks*, yet without exact Temperance in these, we cannot have either *Righteousness* or *Peace* or *Joy in the HOLY GHOST*.

It may therefore have a very happy Effect, if whenever People introduce the Subject, you directly close in, and push it home, that they may understand a little more of this important Truth.

28. But

28. But "I find at present very little Desire to change either my Thoughts or Practice." Shall I speak plain? I fear, by not standing your Ground, by Easiness, Cowardice, and false Shame, you have grieved the SPIRIT of GOD, and thereby lost your Conviction and Desire at once.

Yet you add, "I advise every one to leave off Tea if it hurts their Health, or is inconsistent with Frugality; as I advise every one to avoid Dainties in Meat, and Vanity in Dress, from the same Principle." Enough, enough! Let this only be well pursued, and it will secure all that I contend for. I advise no Persons living to leave it off, if it does not hurt the Health either of them or their Brethren; and if it is not inconsistent with the Christian Frugality, of cutting off every needless Expence.

29. But "to be subject to the Consequences of leaving it off again! This I cannot bear."

I answer, First, It may be so. You cannot easily bear it. For by your giving up the Point once, you have made it much harder to stand your Ground now, than it was at first. Yet still 'tis worth all your Courage and Labour; since the Reasons for it are still as strong as at the Beginning.

Secondly, As to the Consequences you fear, they are shadowy all; they are a mere Lion in the Streets.—"Much Trouble to others." Absolutely none at all, if you take the Tea-kettle, and fill your Cup with Water.—"Much foolish Discourse." Take the preceding Advice, and it will be just the Reverse.—"Nothing helpful toward the Renewal of my Soul in the Image of JESUS CHRIST." What a deep Mistake is this? Is it not helpful to speak closely of the Nature of his inward Kingdom? To encourage one another in casting off every Weight, in removing every Hindrance of it? To inure ourselves to the Bearing his Cross? To bring Christianity into common Life? And accustom ourselves to conduct even our minutest Actions by the great Rules of Reason and Religion?

30. Is it

30. Is it "not of any Importance" to do this?— I think, it is of vast Importance. However, "it is "a very small Circumstance in Self-denial." It is well if you find it so. I am sure I did not. And I believe the Case is the same with many others at this Day. But you say, "I have so many other "Assaults of Self-Indulgence, that this is as nothing."—It is "nothing," said one to a young Woman, "to fast once or twice a Week; to deny "yourself a little Food. Why don't you deny "yourself as to Anger and Fretfulness, as to "Peevishness and Discontent?" She replied, "That "I want: So I deny myself in little Things first, "till I am able to do it in greater." Neither you nor I can mend her Reply. Go thou and do likewise.

31. I have done what I proposed, and indeed in many more Words than I at first intended. I have told you the Occasion of every Step I have taken, and the Motives inducing me thereto; and have considered what either you, or others, have urged on the contrary Side of the Question.

And now the Advice I would give upon the whole is this: First, Pray earnestly to GOD for clear Light, for a full, piercing, and steady Conviction, that this is the more excellent Way. Pray for a Spirit of universal Self-denial, of cheerful Temperance, of wise Frugality: For Bowels of Mercies, for a kind compassionate Spirit, tenderly sensible of the various Wants of your Brethren? And for Firmness of Mind, for a mild even Courage, without Fear, Anger, or Shame. Then you will once more, with all Readiness of Heart, make this little (or great) Sacrifice to GOD: And withal present your Soul and Body a living Sacrifice, acceptable unto GOD, thro' JESUS CHRIST.

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*FINIS.*



