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25
L E T T E R S

THAT PASSED BETWEEN

The Rev. JOHN WESLEY,

AND

Mr. JOHN ATLAY,

RELATIVE TO THE

People and Preaching-house at Dewsbury.

WITH

A short Statement of FACTS,

BY

WAY OF INTRODUCTION.

L O N D O N :

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1790



 L E T T E R S, &c.

I N T R O D U C T I O N.

THE public share which I had in the late dispute, relative to Dewsbury preaching house, has been stated by each of the parties concerned. Mr. Wesley's friends have treated me as they thought I deserved, and the trustees have been pleased to vindicate both their own conduct and mine, by a plain recital of facts. As by the publications now referred to, our respective friends had an opportunity of forming their own opinion of the several transactions; I flattered myself, that charity and a sense of decorum, would at the least have proved some restraint upon the violence of those dispositions, which do no honour to the character of a Christian. I lament that my expectations have not been well founded, for all the engines of persecution that the laws of this country will permit to be employed, are incessantly in action against me. Many of my friends are therefore extremely urgent with me to lay before

the world, the letters which passed between Mr. Wesley and myself relative to Dewsbury-House, and it is not without reluctance that I comply with their request. To render the letters more intelligible, I will premise a very concise narrative of facts by way of introduction.

About four and twenty years ago, I was appointed by Mr. Wesley as one of his travelling preachers, to labour in and about Dewsbury: after one year's residence, I was removed to Whitehaven, where I continued two years; and from thence I was sent into Scotland, where I remained three years. Mr. Wesley then ordered me to return to Dewsbury, at which place, and at Bradford, I continued three years more: I was then appointed to labour in London; and a few months after my arrival there, (as Mr. Wesley's book-keeper quitted his service,) I was particularly requested to enter into that department: to oblige Mr. Wesley I went into the Book-room, and continued there fifteen years:

In the year 1783, a dispute arose between Mr. Wesley, and the people of Dewsbury, relative to the manner in which their Preaching-house should be settled. Mr. W. requested them to assign over their house to *himself*, during his life; and that after his death, the government of it should devolve to such of his preachers as he should stile the *Conference*.

The Trustees, &c. would not accede to this proposal:—They were accordingly informed by Mr. Wesley, that if they refused to comply with his
his

his proposition, he would withdraw his preachers, and they might then provide themselves with ministers where they could.

At this period I received a letter from Dewsbury, which contained the preceding information, and also requested my advice and opinion. In my answer, I told them, I thought the request an unreasonable one; and as to the "threat of removing their Preachers," I did not think them in any danger, for I could not suppose Mr. Wesley capable of an action so impolitic; and that they had nothing to do but to "stand still."

They wrote to me again, and told me they were still threatened with the removal of their Preachers, and asked me if I could point out a Preacher that would be willing to come amongst them, in case they should be left. The day on which I received their letter, a friend who had been many years in connexion with Mr. Wesley, called to see me: I read over the letter to him, told him all I knew of the affair, and what I thought of the people of Dewsbury, and asked him if he would go amongst them, in case Mr. Wesley should withdraw his Preachers. He told me he would, and gave me leave to write to them, and tell them so.

In their answer to my letter, after thanking me for my trouble in enquiring for a Preacher, they declined accepting his services; and added, "That they did not think any person could heal their breaches, and keep their congregations together so well as myself;" therefore

they earnestly requested (in case they should be left) that I would come amongst them.

After much deliberation and prayer, I thought it right to make them a promise, that if Mr. Wesley did withdraw his Preachers, I would comply with their invitation ; though I was hitherto fully persuaded in my own mind, that Mr. Wesley knew mankind too well to venture upon such a step. I pleased myself therefore with this idea, that my promise to the people of Dewsbury will do them good in quieting their minds, and it will bring me no harm, for I shall never be called to fulfil it. But "*The Lord seeth not as man seeth.*"

Mr. Wesley did withdraw the Preachers from them : then, and not till then, I felt myself obliged to go to Dewsbury. I accordingly wrote the letter to Mr. Wesley which stands first in the order of reading, and was in hopes that he would have seen into the evil, before it was too late to apply a remedy, but I was mistaken. When the time came that I must go, the hope and desire of my heart still was, that I might some way or other, bring about a reconciliation ; but alas ! my ardent wishes have here been frustrated.

I had scarcely left London, before Mr. Wesley in the New Chapel in the presence of many hundreds of people, represented me as one of the vilest of men ; and although nearly sixteen months have now elapsed, Mr. Wesley continues with unwearied assiduity, to exhibit his charges, and to load me with the most bitter

re-

reproaches. To such of the former as his particular friends have favoured me with, I shall make some reply : To the latter, I shall submit in silence.

In the first place, I am accused of "Ingratitude." This is a very vague indeterminate accusation ; Mr. Wesley ought first to state my obligations to him, before he makes a claim to any extraordinary efforts of Gratitude. When he can prove that my gratitude does not bear a just proportion to the favours he has conferred, I will acquiesce in the justice of the charge.

Secondly, I am accused of, "Cruelty." If there be any meaning in this crimination it must imply, that I have either treated Mr. Wesley, or the people of Dewsbury, with "cruelty." If to leave Mr. W's service, when called by conscience and duty, be esteemed "cruelty" towards him, I am sorry for it. I never thought myself necessary either to his interest or reputation, and he must excuse me if my principles will not permit me to sacrifice every thing for his sake. With respect to the people of Dewsbury, I really thought them cruelly treated by Mr. W. and by leaving him, I proposed to comfort and help them.

Thirdly, I am accused of "want of Honour." Wherein my want of honour has appeared in the whole transaction, I cannot discover. When Mr. W. had forsaken a numerous body of christians, and deprived them to the utmost of his power of the means of grace, I went to them in their necessity, as a Minister of the Gospel. One great

great object in this undertaking was, if possible, to reconcile together Mr. W. and his people; and I am still ready to employ my best influence to heal the division, if he will concede to such terms, as are consistent with a moderate man, and a Christian.

Fourthly, I am accused of "Injustice," in depriving Him of the people at Dewsbury. I do solemnly declare, I never in my life, by word or letter, attempted to draw away any of those people from him, but ever endeavoured to preserve the union of his Societies. I advised them with great earnestness to continue in connexion with Mr. Wesley, and told Mr. Wesley, if he would but send Preachers to Dewsbury I would never leave him. His answer was, "I have nothing to do with the people of Dewsbury."

I had not sold myself to Mr. Wesley for life, yet I always thought and intended that nothing but death should part us; but the Lord has suffered that strange event to take place, which in all probability has parted us till death. I hope we may meet in Heaven. I always honoured Mr. Wesley, not for his holiness, but for his usefulness; I always thought God had put great honour upon him, in making him a means of much good to others. There are many things in him I wish to imitate, but hope never to imitate him in injuring the characters of those, who in many instances *are, or may be,* much better than myself.

I wish Mr. Wesley would read over his own Sermon on the Cure of evil speaking, for I fear he is too much like those of the faculty, who prescribe for others, what they seldom use themselves. It never was my intention to assume the charge of a congregation of people, much less to undertake the care of many; but I am brought into this situation against my will, and I must now act in the best manner I can, till I see it my duty to quit my charge; nor can I plead a better apology for my conduct, than Mr. W. formerly offered for his own, in his "Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion."

It is with concern that I complain of the many injurious, false, and scandalous things, which Mr. Wesley is frequently uttering against me. I wish him better employment; and as he cannot have much more time to spend in this world, that he would turn his thoughts more upon himself, and live more to God, that his end may be peace.

JOHN ATLAY.

Willburn Place, North Shields.

January, 4th. 1790.

COPY

L E T T E R S, &c.

Copy of a Letter to Mr. WESLEY.

London, Aug. 19th. 1788.

Rev. and dear Sir,

I Was in hopes matters at Dewsbury would have been made up, but by a letter yesterday, am informed it is quite otherwise, that their preachers are removed from them, and their place declared vacant, in consequence of which, they (the Trustees) have most solemnly called me to come amongst them: They plead my promise, and I cannot go back from it; with me a promise is Sacred, though it should be ever so much to my hurt, and as to temporals it must hurt me much; but I do not regard that, if I am but more useful in life, and there is a prospect that I shall be much more useful there, than I ever have been, or can be in London. But it gives me more pain than I can express when I tell you, that (in order to go there) I must quit the Book-room; the longest that I can stay in it will be till the twenty-fifth of the next month, and by that time you will be able to
get

get one for my place ; and I think the fittest man in the world for it is brother Bradford : if he should be appointed, he may come directly, and stay with us till we go, and by that time I could teach him more than he can learn in three months without me ; but these things I leave to your superior judgment.

I have only now to request a few things of you, and have done ; do not be angry with me for leaving you, after having spent fifteen of the best years of my life in serving you with more care, fear, labour, and pain, than all the years of my life have produced, and put them altogether. Do not blame me for going to a people you have left, they are the Lord's redeemed ones, and some of them living members of his body. Do not disown me, nor forbid my preaching in any of your places ; but give me leave where and when it is agreeable to the Preachers, to preach in your houses. But if this request cannot be comply'd with, then drop me silently, and let me be of too little consequence to say any thing about me from the pulpit or pews. I beg you will write to me by return of Post, and do not write unkindly to

Your faithful Servant and Friend,

JOHN ATLAY.

Mr.

Mr. WESLEY's Answer.

Pembroke, Aug. 23. 1788.

My dear Brother,

IF you are persuaded that such a promise (which is the whole and sole cause of the breach at Dewsbury *) is binding, &c. you must follow your persuasion; you will have blame enough from other persons; my hand shall not be upon you; if I can do you good I will, but shall certainly do you no harm. George Whitefield is the person I chuse to succeed you, I with you would teach him as much as you can, without delay.

I am, with kind love to S. Atlay,

Your affectionate Brother,

J. WESLEY.

* "The promise" so far from being "the cause of the breach," was conditional, and of no force, unless Mr. W. himself chose to make "the breach." This however, is only a slight mistaking of cause for effect!

Second

Second Letter to Mr. WESLEY.

London, Aug. 28th. 1788.

Rev. and dear Sir.

I Thank you for your kind letter, and will preserve it as long as the paper will hang together, or as long as I live.

Last night I had two hours conversation with Brother Whitfield, he is fully determined not to come into the Book-room, and therefore some other must be apply'd to, to fill up that place; I still think brother Bradford the person for it. I told Mr. Whitfield last night, that if you would send two preachers to Dewsbury as usual, and let every thing drop into its old channel, I would stay with you to the day of your death or mine. But I have received a long letter to day from Mr. Pawson, which has more fully than ever, convinced me, that I ought to go to Dewsbury; and therefore now can only stay, if you will send them two preachers, with whom they will be fully satisfy'd, and who will be thoroughly satisfy'd to go to them as the healers of all breaches; then, and only then, can I consider myself as free from my promise to them: I shall wait your kind and welcome answer by return of post; and am now determined that you under God shall determine for me. Appoint who you will for the Book-room, and I will go to Dewsbury; or appoint who you will for Dewsbury (if they are only men of peace) and

B I

I will stay with you, and endeavour till death to convince you, that

I am your dutiful Son and Servant,

JOHN ATLAY.

N. B. Mr. Pawson's letter informed me that the people of Dewsbury were all of one heart and mind, beyond any thing he had ever seen in all his life, and were determined to stand by each other, and never give up their house.

Mr. WESLEY's Answer.

Bristol, Aug. 31. 1788.

I Pray Brother Atlay do not serve me so. If you will not serve me yourself, do not hinder others from serving me. Do not fright George Whitfield from it; but encourage him to it; and instruct him as quick as possible. My death* is nothing to the purpose. I have now nothing to do with the Dewsbury people; go with them and serve them, but I am still

Your affectionate Brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

* George Whitfield wrote to Mr. Wesley, and I suppose had said something about his death.

JOHN

The Third Letter to Mr. WELSEY.

London, Sept. 2d. 1788.

Rev. and dear Sir,

I Never did hinder George Whitfield from serving you, let him testify if I did.

I am your affectionate

JOHN ATLAY.

Mr. WESLEY's Answer to the
above two lines.

Bristol, Sep. 4th. 1788.

My dear Brother,

I Was once afraid that you had dissuaded Geo. Whitfield from taking charge of the Books; but I can take your word; now I am fully satisfied that you did not, and I believe you will teach him every thing relating to that charge. But one thing is much upon my mind, I wish you would hire one or two proper persons, and take an inventory of all the books that are either
in

in the shop, or under the chapel, this will be worth all the pains, then George will know what he has to do.

I am your affectionate Brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

The Fourth Letter to Mr. WESLEY.

London, Sep. 6th. 1788.

Rev. and dear Sir,

I Am ready to give all the assistance that will be wanted, or rather that is in my power, in taking the flock : I have had many a long day and week's work at it before, but this will be the last. I am exceeding poorly at present, I believe it is all owing to my fretting about Dewsbury ; and my fears lest I should take a wrong step, have greatly tormented me ; but last Monday when I read your letter, bidding me go and serve them,* there was a something broke in on my soul of light and liberty, such as I never felt in my life : I thought, I will serve them for the Lord's sake with every power I possess.

The beginning of the week we shall get most of our furniture on board the ship ; it sails on the 11th of this month, goes to Selby, and from thence

* See Mr. W's. Second Letter.

thence the boats will take them to Dewsbury. I am glad you are satisfied respecting my not dissuading George Whitfield; No Sir, I have never deceived you with lying vanities, nor ever will. To-day I preached in the Morning Chapel for the last time—Dr. Coke, and Mr. Moor have forbid my preaching in the Great Chapel, and at West-street; I should have done no harm, but they have often served me so, and therefore I need not wonder; I shall soon be out of their reach, and then they will be at rest. I shall always be glad to hear of you, or from you, and am

Your affectionate,

JOHN ATLAY.

The Fifth Letter to Mr. WESLEY.

London, Sep. 20th. 1788.

Rev. and dear Sir,

WE have almost this moment finished our job of taking the stock, and as near as we can tell, your stock is this day worth Thirteen Thousand, Seven Hundred and Fifty-one pounds Eighteen Shillings and Five-pence, according to the Prices fixed in the Catalogue; however, you may be sure it is not less than that; most of these are saleable things, you will be sure to find sale for them if you live, and if not, they will

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will

will be of equal value to those to whom you leave them.

I intend to leave London on Wednesday the 24th, I should have stayed till Thursday, but a report is more or less spreading here, that you are telling the people in Bristol; that "Atlay" will not leave the Book-room in order to "make way for Mr. Whitfield, and that you must come up to London in order to get him out." I do not believe you capable of saying so; nay, I am almost confident you *could not*, because you *knew* the direct contrary was the case: But as this is reported, I shall go one day before the time I had fixed, to let every one see, I need not be driven out. I have given brother Whitfield every instruction that I can, and shall continue so to do, and hope he will do very well; I trust he is a good man;—and will be attentive to his business I have no doubt. I know not that he will have occasion for any of my instructions after I am gone; but if he have, he needs only write to me, I shall always be glad to serve you or him.

I am, Rev. and dear Sir,

You truly affectionate,

JOHN ATLAY

Mr

Mr. WESLEY's Answer to my
Fifth Letter, which he sent to
Dewsbury.

Bristol, Sep. 24th. 1788:

My dear brother,

FROM the time that you gave me warning of quitting my service, and informed me, you was determined to stay no longer with me (unless upon impossible conditions,*) than the twenty-fifth instant; I resolved to say nothing more or less about it, but to let the matter go as it *wou'd* go. Whether you made a wise choice in preferring your present to your former station, we shall see, if you and I should live two or three years longer. Mean time,

I am, as ever,

Your affectionate brother,

JOHN WESLEY.

P. S. I say nothing about you to the people of Bristol.

* See the impossible conditions in the three last lines of my second letter.

☞ I have unquestionable evidence, that Mr. Wesley, at this time had said all that about me
in

in Bristol, which I charge him with, an account of which I received at Dewsbury on the Saturday ;—and the day following, Mr. Wesley in the New Chapel in London, represented me as having robb'd him both of the Chapel, and people at Dewsbury ; and ever since that time, he and his Preachers have represented me as one of the vilest of mankind.

N. B. The above letter concluded our correspondence.

The

The following Passage, extracted from a little Tract, which Mr. WESLEY formerly Published as a Delineation of the Character of a METHODIST, may prove as a Word in Season to many.

“ HE cannot *speæk evil* of his Neighbour, no
 “ more than he can lie, either for God or
 “ Man. He cannot utter an unkind word of
 “ any one ; for Love keeps the door of his
 “ lips. He cannot *speæk idle words*. *No corrupt*
 “ *communication ever comes out of his mouth*. as is
 “ all that *which is not good, to the use of edifying,*
 “ *not fit to minister grace to the hearers*. But
 “ *whatsoever Things are pure, whatsoever things*
 “ *are lovely, whatsoever things are justly of good*
 “ *report, he thinks, and speaks, and acts, adorn-*
 “ *ing the Gospel of our LORD JESUS CHRIST*
 “ *in all things.*”

The Character of a Methodist, by J. W. Page 11.

The

The following Verses were written by a late eminent Servant of God, to express his Opinion of the Dewsbury Affair, a little before he was called to his eternal Reward.

CHRIST our merciful High Priest,
 With thy people's Grief distressed,
 Help us for our guide to pray,
 Lest in his mistaken way.

By a shew of good misled,
 Lest he farther shou'd proceed,
 Stop, restrain him, and defend
 Till the hour of darkness end.

Hide him from the thing design'd,
 Not according to thy mind ;
 Save him from the purpos'd ill,
 After his, but not thy will.

We alas! can nothing do,
 But present him to thy view,
 Weeping, at thy feet complain,
 All the help of man is vain.

'Gainst the Truth he stops his ears,
 Will not see his children's tears ;
 Shuts his eyes against the light,
 Sure that he alone is right.

Whom

Whom we cannot undeceive,
 Lord we to thy mercy give ;
 Seize him for thy mercy's sake,
 Bring our wand'ring shepherd back.

We concerning this agree,
 In thy name to ask of thee,
 Pity on thy servant shew,
 Shew him what he dreads to know.

Of his ignorance convince,
 Of his least suspected fins,
 Zeal a name and sect to raise,
 Love of pow'r, and thirst of praise:

Mov'd by one united pray'r,
 Pluck his feet out of the snare ;
 Guide of our bewild'red Guide,
 Save him from the gulph of pride.

Rescu'd by thy spirit's Groans,
 Pleading in his pious sons,
 Lead to his reward above,
 Thro' the path of humble love.



