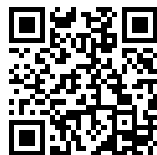


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A  
L E T T E R

TO THE

Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY;

In ANSWER to

His late P A M P H L E T,

ENTITLED,

“ FREE THOUGHTS ON the PRESENT STATE  
“ of PUBLIC AFFAIRS.”

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L O N D O N :

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M DCC LXXI.


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A  
L E T T E R  
T O T H E  
Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY.

S I R,

OU may, perhaps, object to the propriety of my thus addressing you as the author of a pamphlet, to which you have not prefixed your name: but as it has been attributed to you in the public papers, as it is universally understood to be your's, and as it contains the strongest internal marks of

B

your



your being the writer, I shall take the liberty of addressing you as such. Supposing you not to be the author of the pamphlet in question, you may easily disavow it; but as I cannot entertain the least doubt of your being so, I shall hereafter, without further apology, address you under that character.

There are some who may, perhaps, think, that it was scarcely worth any man's while to take the pains to answer a pamphlet written by you, on the subject of our political disputes. But I am sensible of the great extent of your influence and connexions; and that you have it in your power to do abundantly more mischief than may be generally apprehended, by propagating, in a very diffusive manner, opinions extremely pernicious to the best interests of this country.

Previous to the Remarks which I intend to make, on your "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs," I must observe, that I do not intend minutely to consider every passage in your  
pam-

pamphlet. It consists of too great a variety of particulars; and you have artfully introduced such a number of questions, that you may seem to assert little, though you insinuate a great deal, that it would fill a large volume to give a particular answer to your numerous interrogatories. I shall, therefore, content myself with making such observations as shall occur to me, on the most remarkable passages and reasonings in your performance; but sufficient, I hope, to shew, that your arguments are inconclusive, that your insinuations are unjust, and that your pamphlet merits the censure of every friend to freedom and the British constitution; and that it is only calculated to please a corrupt ministry, and their venal partizans.

You open your performance with great professions of modesty, and of your little skill in political matters. You, however, soon inform us, that you possess certain happy dispositions of mind, which will the better enable you to form a just judgment respecting our political disputes. " This advantage (you say) I have over

B 2

" both

“ both parties, the being angry at neither.”  
 “ — I have likewise another advantage,  
 “ that of having no bias, one way or the  
 “ other (a).” It is truly very unfortunate  
 for the popular party, that a man of your  
 extreme meekness and moderation, possessed  
 of an understanding so unclouded by pas-  
 sion, and so entirely free from every impro-  
 per bias, should not be able to say one word  
 in their favour, or in that of their cause.  
 And it is incontestably a most conspicuous  
 evidence of your *impartiality*, that every  
 part of your pamphlet favours one side  
 only; in short, that it is neither more nor  
 less than a studied insult upon all who have  
 asserted the cause of public freedom, and  
 a defence, or extenuation, of the most ob-  
 noxious measures of administration. How-  
 ever, as to your declaration of being angry  
 with neither party, that, I believe, after a  
 perusal of your performance, will prove  
 only this, (which may probably not be  
 considered as an advantage to your cha-  
 racter) that you are capable of writing

(a) Free Thoughts on the present State of public  
 Affairs, p. 6.

very

very malevolent things without being angry, or at least without having the violence of passion to plead in your excuse.

In the 8th page of your pamphlet, you attempt to vindicate his M——y from a supposed charge of want of understanding; and you endeavour to answer the facts upon which (according to you) this charge is grounded. What those facts are, we learn from the following passage: “It must be acknowledged this charge (of *want of understanding*) is supported by facts, which cannot be denied. The first is, He believes the Bible; the second, He fears God; the third, He loves the Queen.” Now either all that you have said upon this subject means nothing, or it means to insinuate, that the popular party consider these particulars as marks of a weak understanding; which is saying, in other words, that they are a profligate and abandoned set of men; for none but men of that character would consider the K—g’s believing the Bible, fearing God, and having an affection for his Queen, as proofs of a want of understanding. Indeed, I  
doubt

doubt whether even any of *the beasts of the people*, as you elsewhere curiously express it, would seriously urge the facts you speak of, as marks of a weak understanding; for religion is seldom considered as a just object of ridicule, even by the vicious and immoral, unless it be strongly tinctured with superstition or enthusiasm.— If you can put any other sense on the passage to which I refer, do so; but I confess I can understand it in no other light; and in that view it contains an insinuation in the highest degree unjust, injurious, and unchristian. And whatever may be your sentiments upon the matter, I will take the liberty to tell you, Sir, that it is my firm opinion, an opinion not founded upon conjecture, but upon fact and observation, that there are many among those who are the most heartily attached to the popular cause, who, at the same time that they are men of excellent understandings, are as sincere believers of Christianity, and as uniformly virtuous in their conduct and behaviour, to say the least, as Mr. JOHN WESLEY himself.

In

In your manner of stating, and of answering the objections supposed to be made by the popular party, your conduct much resembles that of some of the writers against Christianity. They have eagerly adopted those representations of our divine religion which are the most absurd, inconsistent, and irrational, that they might be enabled to attack it with the greater degree of success. And, in like manner, you have selected some of the most trifling objections, and such as were urged by the weakest of the popular party, and these you have clothed in suitable language, that you might answer them with the greater readiness and facility.

You have been very particular in your examination into his M——y's character, and sufficiently lavish of your encomiums on him; in which you have only imitated some of your Reverend Brethren, both of earlier and of later ages; for the generality of the Clergy, to do them justice, have seldom been backward in offering incense to the throne. I presume, however, from your present situation and connections,

nexions; that you have no aspirations after a mitre; and are only desirous of venting the effusions of your extreme loyalty. Your character of the K—g, nevertheless, certainly deserves some reward: so ample an eulogium ought to be well paid for, “ His whole conduct (you say) both in “ public and private, ever since he began “ his reign, the uniform tenor of his be- “ haviour, the general course both of his “ words and actions, has been worthy of an “ Englishman, worthy of a Christian, and “ worthy of a King (*b*).” This is a great deal to say of any man, and a very high strain of panegyric from you, who are so angry with the ignorant vulgar for affirming more than they can possibly know; while you, to use your own words, are, “ in a man- “ ner, sure of nothing; except of that “ very little which you see with your own “ eyes, or hear with your own ears (*c*).” But all this, peradventure, you affirm from your own knowledge, and the evidence of your own senses: if so, you must be better known at court than might have

(*b*) Free Thoughts, p. 16.

(*c*) Ibid. p. 5.

been

been suspected, or than we should have conjectured from your intimations at the beginning of your performance. You supposed, however, that whatever you might say on this subject was in little danger of being publickly controverted; for it is a ticklish thing to meddle with the characters of monarchs, in any other strain but that of praise, which you have wisely adopted. Living kings are always good and gracious, and the best of princes; though, unfortunately, after their deaths, impartial history is often forced to tell a very different tale. I shall, however, say no more on this delicate subject. It is enough to remind you, that the real Christian, the man of undissembled virtue, will not violate the sacred law of truth to gratify those in the most exalted situations, and scorns even to flatter kings.

You attempt to ridicule the propensity of the English nation to political disquisitions, and seem to think, with some others, that it is an absurdity for common people to meddle with such matters.

C



ters (*d*). And, indeed, arbitrary princes and ministers, and their minions, have ever been desirous of propagating this doctrine: they would wish the people to shut their eyes, and hood-wink their understandings; and resign themselves, with implicit reverence, without examination or inquiry, to their mandates, and to their measures. It is very true, that uneducated men, immersed in business, and employed in the lower offices and employments of life, may not be very good judges of difficult matters relative to the conduct of national affairs. But notwithstanding this, the bulk of the people, I believe, seldom judge amiss in points of importance to the interest and welfare of the state. They may err in particular instances; but they form very just notions respecting the nature and tendency of public measures in general, whether matters of domestic government, or treaties and negotiations with foreign nations. The people, in general, are sufficient judges whether their own rights and privileges are attacked, or pre-

(*d*) *Vid.* Free Thoughts, p. 4, 5.

served

served inviolate; and whether the honour and dignity of the nation is maintained abroad. And a more pernicious doctrine can scarcely be advanced in a free state, than this: that the people at large should not meddle with affairs of government. Liberty never was, nor ever will be preserved long in any country where such sentiments prevail: for such is the intoxicating nature of power, that it is always necessary that a free people should guard against its incroachments, and be vigilant and active in the maintenance of their rights. In arbitrary governments, all are equally slaves: but every subject of a free state is interested in public affairs; it cannot be a matter of indifference to him whether the government be good or bad; for it is at least of importance to him that his own rights should be preserved. And the lowest plebeian, who has a vote for members of parliament, should be at least careful to give his suffrage conscientiously, and in favour of those who appear to him to be best disposed to serve their constituents, and the nation. Political inquiries, therefore, are so far from being

ing the result of an absurd propensity in Englishmen, that they are the natural, the necessary consequence of that constitution of government which is established in this country.

You have taken some pains to make it appear, that there is little reason to suppose, that the *Petitions* and *Remonstrances* which have been presented to the King, do in fact contain the *Sense of the Nation*. And you pretend to give us an account of the manner in which nine in ten, or rather (you say) ninety-nine in a hundred, of those petitions are procured. You tell us, that “ a Lord or 'Squire (sometimes  
 “ two or more) goes or sends his steward,  
 “ round the town where his seat is, with  
 “ a paper, which he tells the honest men  
 “ is for the good of their king and coun-  
 “ try. He desires each to set his name  
 “ or mark to these. And who has the  
 “ hardiness to gainsay; especially if my  
 “ Lord keeps open house? Mean time, the  
 “ contents of it they *know nothing about* (e).”

(e) Free Thoughts, p. 12.

I fear,

I fear, Sir, that in this account you have not paid that scrupulous regard to the truth of facts, of which you make such a parade at the beginning of your pamphlet. I should presume, that you must, in this case, have advanced abundantly more than you could possibly "see with your own eyes, or hear with your own ears (*f*).” And, I confess, I am so far from supposing that nine Petitions out of ten have been procured in the manner described by you, that, till I meet with some better evidence of it than your bare assertion, I shall not believe that one Petition of a public nature has been so procured from any part of the kingdom.

Dr. Johnson, another writer on the same side with yourself, had before you given us "the progress of a Petition." But his representation, it must be confessed, contained in it somewhat more probability than your's; and, if it was equally destitute of truth, we yet received some amends from the wit and eloquence of the writer.

(*f*) *Vid.* Free Thoughts, p. 3, 4, 5.

How-

However, after giving an account of the manner in which petitions, if we may believe you, are commonly procured; you inform us, that you were not long since at a town in Kent, when one of these petitions was carrying about. You asked "one and another" whether they had signed the petition, and found none that had refused it; and yet, you tell us, that not one single person to whom you spoke, had either read it, or heard it read. It is truly remarkable, that your Kentish friends and acquaintance should all be such stupid mortals, as to sign a petition which they knew nothing about. But I cannot form the same mean opinion of the generality of my countrymen. I have met with nobody who has been concerned in the business of petitioning and remonstrating, but what knew at least somewhat of the matter. At all the public meetings which have been held for that purpose, the Petitions or Remonstrances have been always read. It is true, that in a numerous meeting the whole may not have been distinctly heard by every individual: but it should be remembered, that people <sup>were</sup> in general previously

viously apprized of the design of such meetings before their assembling, and of the main purport of the intended Petition or Remonstrance. The late applications of that kind to the throne have been almost all upon the same topics; and it is hardly conceivable that there were any who signed them, or who voted for them, but what at least knew that they contained a declaration of their disapprobation of those arbitrary and unconstitutional measures of government, which have been so much canvassed in all companies, from the highest to the lowest, that it is scarcely possible for the meanest artisan to be totally ignorant of them. And in this view I consider the late Petitions and Remonstrances as truly declarative of the Sense of the Nation.

But, however unwilling you are to admit this, it is evident from other passages in your pamphlet, in which you seem not very consistent with yourself, that you are sufficiently convinced, that a great part of the people are exceedingly dissatisfied with the measures of government. Thus, you say,

say, (P. 8.) that " the general discontent  
 " of the nation now rises to an higher de-  
 " gree than it has done in the memory of  
 " man." And you go so far (P. 34.) as  
 to add, that " the consequences of these  
 " commotions will be (unless an higher  
 " hand interpose) exactly the same as those  
 " of the like commotions in the last cen-  
 " tury." Is it not evident from hence,  
 that you are well convinced that a great  
 part of the people are exceedingly incensed  
 against the measures of government? Why  
 then should you be so extremely unwilling  
 to consider the Petitions and Remonstran-  
 ces, which contain a declaration of the  
 people's disapprobation of the measures of  
 administration, as expressive of the sense  
 of the nation? But surely the least that  
 can be fairly supposed is, that they contain  
 the sense of a great part of the nation.  
 As to myself, I have not the least doubt,  
 from all that I can learn, both from my  
 own observation, and the information of  
 others, but that, notwithstanding the great  
 numbers who are interested in supporting  
 the measures of the court, a very consider-  
 able majority of the nation do entirely dis-  
 approve

approve of those measures of government, which in this reign have justly excited so much opposition.

You also intimate to us, that you consider the Petitioners and Remonstrants as no judges of the matters of which they complain. But some observations which I have before made, may, I presume, be considered as a sufficient answer to this. You then tell us, what you suppose Mr. Pitt, now Lord Chatham, would have said, if petitions had been presented against his administration (*d*). His Lordship, I dare say, will easily excuse you, if you do not give yourself the trouble of making any more speeches for him; for you seem very little acquainted with his sentiments, his spirit, or his manner. And, in opposition to your suppositions respecting him, I must here observe, that when he was in power, he never appeared disposed to despise the opinions of his countrymen; he was always willing to make his appeal to the tribunal of the public, and the rectitude of his con-

(*d*) Free Thoughts, p. 13, 14.



duct enabled him to make that appeal safely. And even the common people, ignorant and stupid as you seem desirous of representing them, could easily discern the merit of his administration. They saw, and acknowledged, with the rest of Europe, that this great minister, by his superior abilities, had raised the reputation and prosperity of Great Britain to a height not to be paralleled at any former period. And accordingly, in some of those parts of the kingdom, which had formerly been the most remarkable for disaffection, it was observed that the people, during the administration of Lord Chatham, (then Mr. Pitt) discovered an attachment and good-will to the government never known before: and indeed his conduct deservedly met with the general approbation of the whole British empire. Such was the remarkable difference between this great Statesman, and those to whom the reins of government have been since entrusted! He, by the wisdom of his measures, made those who had been before disaffected to become good subjects: whilst they have alienated from his Majesty the affections of those who

were

were formerly the most attached to his person, and to his family.

As to your curious collection of inquiries respecting Lord Chatham's personal character, (P. 43, 44.) they deserve no answer. Indeed, they are such, as I should suppose no man of common charity and candour could scarcely read with patience. You seem to suppose, that the people of England can with no propriety desire a change of the ministry, unless they can recommend persons to the king to hold their offices, who possess every good quality, and every virtue, that imagination can suggest (*e*): and that 'till they can do this, they have no right to *stretch their throats* (as you *elegantly* express it) against evil ministers. But the inhabitants of this country are not so unreasonable as to expect ministers quite so perfect. They will think, I believe, with me, that many men might be found, who would be much more careful not to violate the constitution, and abundantly more attentive to the in-

(*e*) *Vid.* Free Thoughts, p. 42, 43.

terests of the nation, than our present ministers, or any that we have had for some time past, and yet be far from coming up to your standard of *perfection*. At least, they are willing to make the experiment, because they think they cannot easily change for the worse. And, I believe, they are also of opinion, that Lord Chatham may have been, and may still be, an excellent and truly respectable minister, and highly deserving the confidence of the public, although he be not entirely free from the imperfections incident to human nature.

You do not mean, you tell us, (P. 18.) to defend the measures which have been taken relative to the Middlesex Election; and then you immediately proceed to say all that you can in support of that obnoxious measure, which has so justly excited the indignation of the public. The affair of the Middlesex election has now been so much canvassed, that it would be tedious to enter at large into the dispute, and it would be inconsistent with the intended brevity of my letter. I shall, however, make a few remarks upon the subject; tho' I believe that neither your sophistry, nor  
the

the curious argumentation of Lord Mansfield, one of whose speeches you have introduced at length, that your readers may "see this whole matter in the *clearest light*," (as you express it) will ever be able to convince the public of the rectitude of that measure; or that it was not a gross invasion of the rights of the people. The injustice of seating a man in the great council of the nation, who had only 296 votes, in preference to another who had 1143, strikes at the first view. And it is certain, that by such a procedure, the freeholders were to all intents and purposes deprived of the liberty of electing their own representatives in parliament. But you say, (P. 19.) that "if the electors had the liberty of choosing *any qualified person*, "it is absolute nonsense to talk of their *being deprived of the liberty of choosing*, "because they were not permitted to choose *a person utterly unqualified*." But, unfortunately, the truth of the matter is, that Mr. Wilkes was so far from being utterly unqualified, that he was as legally eligible as any other man. Lord Mansfield, indeed, says, (according to your pamphlet) that

that Mr. Wilkes was considered by the laws as an *unqualified person*. But it is well known, that his lordship never has produced, nor never can produce, any *law* to that purpose; and a mere vote of the House of Commons, which is all that can be produced, cannot constitute any legal disability; so that all this kind of reasoning falls to the ground.

You say, “ That a right of *expulsion*,  
 “ of *putting* a member out of the House,  
 “ manifestly implies a right of exclusion,  
 “ of *keeping* him out; otherwise that right  
 “ amounts to just nothing at all.” To  
 which I answer, that the right of the people to elect their own representatives, is of infinitely more importance to the constitution, than the right, or, to speak more properly, the *practice*, of expulsion in the House of Commons: for on this right of the people, the very existence of the House of Commons itself depends. All the power possessed by the House of Commons, is a delegated power, entrusted to them by their constituents; and it cannot be shewn that the people have ever intrusted the  
 House

House of Commons with a right of rejecting or expelling representatives, after being fairly chosen; not even for misdemeanors, if their constituents choose to re-elect them. And, therefore, it by no means follows, that because the people have not opposed the power of expulsion, when occasionally exercised by the House of Commons, in a manner not disagreeable to the people, that therefore the House has a *right* to expel a member whom his constituents have repeatedly re-elected, and declared in the most public and absolute manner, their desire of again entrusting as their representative. The rights of the freeholders and electors of England are coeval with the constitution, and cannot by any power be taken away without their own consent. And certainly they are the best, and only proper judges, of the qualifications of those whom they send to parliament as their deputies and representatives.

You also say, (P. 19.) “ But suppose a single  
 “ borough or county were deprived of this  
 “ in a single instance; how is this depriving  
 “ the good people of England, the nation,  
 “ tion,

"tion, of their birthright? What an in-  
 "sult upon common sense is this wild way  
 "of talking? If Middlesex is wronged  
 "(put it so) in this instance, how is York-  
 "shire or Cumberland affected by it? or  
 "twenty counties and forty boroughs be-  
 "sides? Much less all the nation?" I will  
 tell you, Sir, how other counties are af-  
 fected by the decision respecting Middle-  
 sex, and how the whole nation is affected  
 by it; and must at the same time take the  
 liberty to tell you, that your stiling the  
 language which you oppose, "an insult  
 "upon common sense," and "a wild way  
 "of talking," can only arise from your  
 real, or pretended ignorance, of the com-  
 mon principles of a free government.

If the House of Commons had a right  
 to set aside a member fairly chosen by the  
 county of Middlesex, and who was not *legally*  
 disqualified, it has also a right to set aside  
 any member chosen by any other county  
 or borough in the kingdom. By a deci-  
 sion, therefore, which in a single instance  
 deprives the county of Middlesex of the  
 right of election, the possession of that  
 right

right in every other part of the kingdom, is rendered precarious. And it is impossible to suppose that those who have deprived the county of Middlesex of one of their most essential rights, will be tender of the privileges of other counties or boroughs, and far less of the rights of individuals. No such decision, therefore, can be made, but what must materially affect the liberties of the whole kingdom. For it has been justly observed, that if the House of Commons has a right to incapacitate one man, it has the same right to incapacitate two, three, or any number; that is, it can disfranchise all the electors of England. But no such power was, or could be delegated to it; and as it did not make itself, it cannot make its own power. If the people look on unconcernedly, and see individuals only deprived of their constitutional rights, what security can they possibly have for the possession of their own liberties? What must be the case, then, if they look tamely on, and see a whole county deprived of a privilege so important, that the very existence of the constitution itself depends on its preservation? It is you,

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there-



therefore, Sir, who have talked wildly and absurdly, in supposing that a decision injurious to the right of election in the county of Middlesex, would not affect the other parts of the kingdom.

It was natural for the people to be the more alarmed at such a determination as that in the Middlesex election, if they had good reason to believe, that this violent measure was effected merely to gratify the court and ministry. You make, indeed, a long extract from another writer, in order to shew that there is no reason to suppose the parliament to be corrupt. And that gentleman urges the passing of the bill for lessening the privileges of members of parliament, and for determining petitions about contested elections, as full proof of the virtue of the parliament. The first of these bills was undoubtedly a good one, and the second was well intended, and brought in by a gentleman in the opposition; though it has been doubted by good friends to the constitution, whether it was well calculated to answer the intended purpose. But it does not appear, that either of  
these

these bills thwarted any immediate views of those then in administration; and it must be shewn that they were opposed by the ministry, (which I apprehend was not the case) before their passing can be considered as any evidence of the incorruptibility of parliament.

With respect to the innocence and virtue of parliament, there is one circumstance which I would submit to your consideration. It is incontestibly the business and duty of the House of Commons to be a check upon the crown and its ministers, and to guard the liberties and interests of the people from their encroachments or misconduct. Now I would ask the most venal partizan of the court, whether he supposes our ministers have always done right for these ten years past? If they have in any instances done wrong, either in extending the prerogative, or in squandering away the public money, it was the duty of the representatives of the people to oppose them. But what if it should appear, that during that whole period the majority in our parliaments have in no one instance

posed the measures of the crown and its ministers? Will the most candid man breathing, upon that supposition, believe that our parliaments have done their duty to their constituents? Or will he desire a stronger proof of their corruption, and of their being under an undue influence from the crown? Whatever may be your ideas upon this subject, Sir, it is certain that the people of England cannot labour under a greater grievance than a corrupt parliament, nor one which they ought to be more earnestly solicitous to remove. Should we have a prince arbitrarily disposed, or the most iniquitous ministers, still the people would have some substantial security for their rights, if our parliaments are uncorrupt; but if they are venal, and under the direction of the crown, the people have then no resources but those of the most violent and dangerous nature.

I was somewhat surprized to observe, that when you were endeavouring to support the proceedings of the ministry, respecting the Middlesex election, you should, among so many who have spoken and written

ten

ten on this subject, single out Lord Mansfield as your auxiliary, who has in general been remarkably reserved upon this subject. You could not think that the popularity of his lordship would give weight to his arguments. But you may possibly have some partiality for his lordship, and his productions, in consequence of some little resemblance in your characters. This comparison may probably surprize those who have not observed, that whatever difference there may be between you in other circumstances, Lord Mansfield and you are both *equally* remarkable for being entirely free from *sophistry, subtilty, and craft*, in your several professions. At least, I am sure the resemblance is to the full as strong between you and his lordship, as between his lordship and Erasmus, to whom my good Lord Bishop of Gloucester (being well known to be fond of paradoxes) hath thought proper to compare our beloved Chief Justice, in a truly admirable dedication prefixed to a late edition of that incomparable work, "The Divine Legation of Moses demonstrated."

You

You endeavour (P. 9, 10.) to vindicate his M——y from the charge of “ pardon-  
 ing a murderer.” But what murderer do you mean? You must know that more than one murderer has been screened from justice in this reign. Do you mean either of the murderers who were pardoned in consequence of the influence and intrigues of their harlot sister? or do you mean either of those ruffians Balse and M’Quirk? If you mean the latter, such hired assassins as they were, must doubtless have been very proper objects of royal mercy! and when we remember that “ doubts arose in the “ royal breast” on this occasion, we remember also that the crimes which these men committed, with a view of obstructing the freedom of election, were perpetrated in order to favour the cause of a man supported by the court. You ask, “ Can you or I believe, that the K—g *knows* him to be such? *Understood* him to be a “ wilful murderer? I am not sure of it at all; neither have you any rational proof: “ —And if he did not *know* or believe him “ to be such, how can he be blamed for “ pardoning him?” By what methods are  
 our

our Kings to *know* the guilt of criminals, but by their being fairly and legally tried and found guilty? Is it proper that all should be pardoned whose guilt is not actually *known* to the King? But, indeed, your strange kind of reasoning seems calculated to justify the pardoning of almost every criminal who is condemned.

As to the subject of *pensions*, you say it is a matter that you do not understand. However, some you think are well bestowed, and all well designed. You except, I suppose, the pension that was paid to the most active of the assassins who was employed at Brentford; as well as that to Macloughlan, for his good services in St. George's Fields. But you fear, you say, that some pensions have been "*ill-bestowed*," on those who not only fly in the face of "their benefactor; but avail themselves of "his favours to wound the deeper." And then you immediately proceed to insinuate a charge against some who receive pensions of "foul and flagrant ingratitude." You mean, I presume, Lord Ch—m and Lord C——n; who, though they receive pensions,

sions, have not been induced thereby to desert the cause of their country in the senate. There is an essential difference to be made between pensions given for real services to the public, and those given as bribes, to induce the receivers of them to concur in every unconstitutional and iniquitous measure of the ministry. The number of pensions that have too frequently been given for the latter purpose, is undoubtedly a capital grievance; but it would be high time that all pensions should be abolished, even those for real services, if it be once taken for granted, that those who receive them, though members of parliament, ought never to oppose the court, under the weak notion of its being ingratitude to the king. A man's first duty is that to his country: All the money with which any pensions are paid, is primarily the money of the people; and no honest man, who has received a pension for actual services to the nation, will ever betray the cause of the public from any unjust complaisance to the crown.

You

You say, (P. 12.) that "this fault," that of granting so many pensions, " (if it " were really such) would argue too great " *easiness* of temper. But this is quite the " reverse of what is commonly objected, " *inflexible stubbornness*." But however specious this argument of your's may at first sight appear, it amounts to nothing when fairly examined. Is it not easy to conceive, that a Prince who may lend a deaf ear to the justest complaints and remonstrances of his subjects, may yet, if he entertains any improper views, be extremely liberal, exceedingly profuse of the public money, to those who are ready to go any lengths to gratify his desires, to fawning parasites, and unprincipled courtiers?

You say, you do not defend the *killing* of Mr. Allen; *murder* you do not chuse to call it. -And after relating that transaction your own way, you add, " Now though " this cannot be excused, yet was it *the* " *most horrid villainy that ever was perpetrated?* Surely, no. Notwithstanding all " the tragical exclamations which have " been made concerning it, what is this to  
F the



“ the killing a man in cool blood? And  
 “ was this never heard of in England ?” (e)  
 I will tell you, Sir, why it was natural that  
 the murder of Mr. Allen, (for so I will  
 venture to call it) and the other murders  
 committed in St. George’s Fields, (it is  
 well known that it was not *one* only)  
 should excite more clamour, and cause a  
 greater alarm in the nation, than the kill-  
 ing a man in cool blood. If a common  
 murder be committed, with whatever cir-  
 cumstances, the laws are open, and the of-  
 fender, or offenders, may be legally pu-  
 nished. But if murders are committed by  
 foldiers acting in the K—’s name, and  
 by his authority, under the specious  
 pretext of keeping the peace; and if the  
 perpetrators of such murders are after-  
 wards protected by the whole power and  
 influence of the crown; this must necessa-  
 rily alarm every intelligent friend to the  
 constitution, abundantly more than the  
 most atrocious murder committed by pri-  
 vate individuals. For in the former case,  
 the people have scarce any mode of redress,

(e) Free Thoughts, p. 18.

if

if the parliament refuse it; and I do not see what possible security the people can have for their liberties, if it be allowable for the ministry, on every trifling occasion, (with the assistance of one or two complaisant justices of the peace) to employ the military against them, when they happen to discover any dissatisfaction at the measures of administration. As to the affair of St. George's Fields, it is not yet quite forgotten, that thanks were returned to the soldiers employed there, in the K—g's name, for their alertness and diligence in putting a period to the lives of some of his M——y's unarmed, defenceless subjects; and that all possible art and influence were employed to screen the actors in that tragedy from the punishment they merited.

Of your *charitable* character of Mr. Wilkes, I shall say little: I must, however, observe, that a man may have many follies, and some vices, and yet it may be doing him great injustice to say, that he has "no regard to virtue or morality." This is what a conscientious divine should

not say of any man, without very substantial evidence. However, after observing that he had abused the ministry, and aspersed the King's mother in the grossest manner, you say, that he was prosecuted "not for this, but *other achievements*;" and then retired to France. What you mean by *other achievements*, is not very easy to say; but indeed it appears intended to convey something very much like an untruth; for, I believe, few readers would understand that phrase to mean the Essay on Woman, or the 45th Number of the North Briton; and I know of nothing else for which he was prosecuted. But whatever may be Mr. Wilkes's private character, whether you chuse to distinguish or not, other people will, between that and the merits of his cause, with which alone the public are concerned. It must be confessed, at the same time, that those who have been favoured by the court, have been remarkable for the excellency of their private lives. The virtues of the court member for Middlesex, Mr. L—ll, are well known; and no man doubts but that for piety, chastity, modesty, sobriety, and other excellencies,

lencies, Lord S——ch and Mr. R——d  
R——y are *shining* characters.

It must be admitted, that for some of the injuries which have been done to Mr. Wilkes, as an individual, the laws have made him compensation; which, by the way, is a demonstration that the people were not altogether in the wrong in supporting him; for the determinations of the courts of justice do at least prove, that the laws had been broken for the purpose of oppressing him. But, with a view of obstructing as much as possible the course of justice; an order was made, by the highest authority, that the fine which was laid as a punishment on an offending Secretary of State, for violating the constitution in the person of Mr. Wilkes, should be paid out of the exchequer: an act which filled every man, who had any just conceptions of law, justice, or the constitution, with astonishment and indignation. For it now appears, that if a minister of state should be with difficulty brought in some degree to justice, whatever expences he may incur for injuring the people, are to be paid out of their  
their

their money: an iniquity which I would suppose, Sir, even you would not attempt to vindicate. At least I am certain, that the man who can defend this, may defend any thing.

You say you do not defend the measures which have been taken with regard to America; and you doubt “whether any man can defend them, either on the foot of law, equity, or prudence (*f*).” But you think to fettle the whole matter by throwing the guilt of it upon the late Mr. George Grenville. I am as little concerned to vindicate that gentleman’s political character as you can be, though he latterly engaged in the opposition: but he is dead, and I will say no more of him. However, I would ask, whether those who have been since him in administration, have not adopted very obnoxious measures respecting the Americans? and whether his M——y himself has not, in his speeches, taken the most absolute and decisive part against them?

(*f*) *Free Thoughts*, p. 25.

With

With regard to your intimations respecting the present ministry, I must observe, that you are exceedingly mistaken, if you imagine the present complaints of the people are merely against the men now ostensibly in power. Their complaints are of a more enlarged nature. They complain of the general tenor of administration for near ten years past; that during that period an ungracious and impolitic system of government appears to have prevailed, irreconcilable with the principles of the English constitution; that the rights of the people have been violated in a variety of instances, and the public treasure shamefully squandered; at the same time that the honour and interest of the nation, with respect to foreign powers, have been scandalously neglected. So that from being in the highest degree of national prosperity, and in such a situation as enabled us almost to give law to Europe, our condition is now so sunk and degraded, that we are scarcely able to defend our own possessions from the insults and attacks of foreign nations.

A2

As to what you say in defence of the manner in which the Petitions and Remonstrances have been received (*g*), it amounts to very little on any other supposition, but that of the complaints of the people being without foundation; which all your sophistry has not been able to make appear. And even on that supposition, the people, though mistaken, are entitled to regard: government was constituted for their benefit, and not merely to support Princes or Ministers in state and luxury. And if those, in whom the powers of government are vested, mean honestly, they may easily find means to convince the people of the rectitude of their intentions. But as to the manner in which the Petitions and Remonstrances were actually received, I feel more than I chuse to express: I should, however, hardly suppose it possible that any man, who deserves the name of Englishman, could think they were received as the complaints and remonstrances of a free-born people ought to have been.

(*g*) Free Thoughts, p. 15.

After

After having, in your manner, answered some of the objections to the late measures of government, you triumphantly exult, "So far we have gained. We have removed the *imaginary causes* of the present commotions (*b*)." Perhaps not. You may possibly have reckoned somewhat too fast, and sung Te Deum without obtaining the victory. I believe no impartial reader, possessed of common sense, will think you have performed so important a service. However, you add, "It plainly appears they are not owing to the *extraordinary badness* (a most *elegant* phrase) either of the king, of his parliament, of his ministers, or of the measures which they have taken." After which you proceed to enquire, "To what then are they owing? What are the *real causes* of this amazing ferment among the people?" And here you appear, indeed, to have made a most admirable discovery. You are very strongly of opinion, but not quite positive, (in which I commend your prudence) that the first and principal cause of

(*b*) Free Thoughts, p. 29.

G

the



the present commotions is *French gold*. How this is distributed, you do not explain in very direct terms: but your meaning manifestly is, that it is given to John Wilkes and some of his adherents, to induce them to disturb the government (*i*). Now after fairly considering your reasons, (if they deserve that name) for this curious conjecture, I must declare, that I do most firmly believe, that there is not one jot more reason to suppose, that Mr. Wilkes or any of his adherents are bribed by the French court, than that Mr. JOHN WESLEY receives a pension from the College of Cardinals, or the Society of Jesuits.

You appear to apprehend, that a dissolution of the P——t would be a step attended with very dangerous consequences to the K—g. For you imagine, that if a new one were to be chosen, it would probably consist of men disposed to carry matters to extremities against him (*k*). But your apprehensions upon this head seem to be without foundation. The popular party,

(*i*) *Free Thoughts*, p. 30, 31. (*k*) *Ibid.* p. 40. 45.

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I am confident, wish to injure the K—g as little as you can do ; they only wish to have the grievances of the people redressed. If they wish for a new election, it is only with the hope of returning men who will really consider themselves as the representatives of the people, and act as such ; and not be always ready to support every measure of the ministry, however arbitrary and unconstitutional, and however inconsistent with the interest of the nation. But you say (P. 40, 41.) that if the K—g were to dissolve the P——t, “ he would be as “ perfectly safe, as the sheep that had given “ up their dogs.” Your idea of a Parliament seems to be quite new. I have always conceived that the Parliament, or at least the House of Commons, were by the very nature of their institution intended as a check upon the crown and its ministers ; and that it was their duty to maintain, on all occasions, the rights of the subject : but you seem, on the contrary, to consider them as a part of the royal body-guard. However, if the parliament must be compared to dogs, surely they ought to be at

least as much the dogs of the people, as the dogs of the crown.

You speak (P. 25.) in very high terms of the liberty which the people of this country now enjoy. And it is true, that a government entirely despotic is not yet quite established among us. It was not to be expected, that our ministers would be hardy enough to seize upon all our liberties at once. But without entering into a minute enumeration of the national grievances, we know, that a whole county has been injured in a point of the utmost importance to the constitution, and that individuals have been arbitrarily imprisoned, without either law or justice. This, according to your principles, is a matter of no importance to any but those who have been personally aggrieved. For if Middlesex is wronged, you say, how is Yorkshire or Cumberland affected by it? And, according to the same mode of reasoning, if John Wilkes or William Bingley are imprisoned, without law, and contrary to the most essential principles of the constitution, what is that to other people? Or if a few individuals

viduals are murdered by the military, by orders from the ministry, what is that to those who are left alive? But the people of this country are not quite senseless enough to be deceived by such sophistry and absurdity. The high sense which they have of the value of the privileges which they yet enjoy, animates them to oppose every encroachment on them with the greater ardour. And it is certain, that if ministers of state are suffered to invade the rights of individuals with impunity, we cannot rationally expect any thing better, than to see ourselves stript by degrees of all our privileges, and sunk at length into a settled state of slavery. No nation that does not guard its liberties with firmness, and with vigilance, will ever continue free,

In the parallel which you draw between the times of Charles the First and the present, (P. 39.) you say, that “ the nation  
 “ in general was *inflamed* with all possible  
 “ diligence, by *Addresses, Petitions, and*  
 “ *Remonstrances*, admirably well devised  
 “ for the purpose; which were the most  
 “ effectual *libels* that could be imagined  
 “ against

“ against the king and government.” But the truth is, that these *libels*, as you are pleased to stile them, (in which you perfectly agree with the court-parasites of Charles’s days) would have had very little effect, if they had not been founded on facts known to the whole kingdom. It was Charles’s arbitrary and illegal administration, and his violent attempts to rob the people of their most important rights, which really *inflamed* the nation against him; and which justly brought on him the opposition that he met with, and which he well deserved. But no writings will ever have so much effect as to excite a nation to acts of violence against a good government; though if a people are injured and oppressed, and their liberties endangered, those who give them just conceptions concerning their situation, do undoubtedly perform a real service to the community.

You likewise observe, (P. 37.) that the opposition in the time of Charles the First, was in a great measure a contest about religion, which is far from being the case at present. And I know that the same observation

servation has been before made, by scrupulous and well-intentioned people. But it should be remembered, that if we once suffer ourselves to be deprived of our civil rights, our religious liberties will then lie at the mercy of the Prince; and we should enjoy them only during his pleasure. I readily admit, that our attention ought not to be wholly, or even chiefly engrossed, by political affairs, or any other matters that relate merely to the present life. The first object of our cares and of our solicitude, ought to be that higher and nobler state of existence, after which we should be constantly aspiring. But surely as all classes of men, the religious as well as the vicious and profane, employ much of their time in things merely of a temporal nature, some attention is due to the preservation of our national liberty, which by every generous mind is estimated as the most valuable of all temporal blessings. And, indeed, it is a duty incumbent on us, as honest men, and as Christians, to take every legal and justifiable method of transmitting down to our posterity those rights, which we have

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enjoyed through the virtue of our brave and public-spirited ancestors.

You seem to think, at the beginning of your performance, that you have great merit, and are much superior to those on the opposite side, (and indeed to other writers on both sides) for the moderation with which you have treated the subjects in dispute; and because you have (as you say) given no ill words, and called no ill names. You expect, therefore, to be abused by the warm men on *both* sides (1). Why you should expect to be abused by the court party, I cannot conceive: they can have no reason to abuse you, unless they think you have defended their cause in a weak or injudicious manner. But as to your having given no ill words, and called no ill names, if you have not done this, you have done what is perhaps much worse, insinuated the worst things you could against the popular party, and attributed to them the most mischievous designs. It is hardly possible for the most rancorous of the court party

(1) *Vid.* Free Thoughts, p. 7.

to insinuate any thing worse against the people in opposition than you have done: in-  
 somuch that you repeatedly charge them  
 with the most traiterous designs (*m*). So  
 that nothing can be more manifest, than  
 that your pretences to moderation and im-  
 partiality are merely affectation. I must,  
 however, observe to you, that I believe the  
 generality of those in opposition are as well  
 affected to the reigning prince and family,  
 as you, or the most loyal of the court  
 party. Great numbers of them have been  
 formerly eminent for their zeal for the  
 House of Hanover; and would now sacri-  
 fice their lives in its defence, provided their  
 laws and liberties are preserved to them in-  
 violate. But they think that tyranny un-  
 der one family is not more tolerable than  
 under another. They know that the  
 Princes of the House of H——r are bound  
 by all the ties of honour and of gratitude,  
 to maintain the rights of the people to  
 whom they owe their elevation; an event  
 which was brought about for that purpose,

(*m*) *Vid.* Free Thoughts, p. 8. 34, 35. 43.

H

and



and for that purpose only; and they are resolved not to submit to slavery under any family.

Towards the close of your pamphlet, (P. 41. 45.) you intimate it to be your opinion, that it is not possible for the K— to do any thing that will quiet the minds of the people. You think that the way he has already taken, that of *standing his ground*, as you express it, (that is, paying no regard to the complaints and remonstrances of the people) was the wisest method he could take. You have, however, hit on something which you think may be an improvement upon this.—And what measure does the reader suppose the meek and moderate Mr. WESLEY has suggested, in order to put a stop to the present commotions? Does he imagine that our honest Divine has advised, that some steps be taken to convince the people that no designs are forming against their liberties? That the principles of the constitution be exactly adhered to, and no infringement made on the rights of individuals? That care be taken that the public money be not squandered,

tered, or employed in bribing the representatives of the people? Or that a due attention be paid by administration to the honour and interest of the nation? No, reader; in truth, Mr. WESLEY has recommended nothing of this nature; nothing that would be so unpalatable to our ministers; he is not so uncourtly. But the meek man, in the benevolence of his heart, can think of nothing to quiet the minds of the people, but the vigorous prosecution of libellers, and a more frequent use of Newgate and the Pillory.

You have not, Sir, it is true, made use of these exact words; but it is not possible for any man to mistake your meaning. You say, (P. 46.) "If any (way) is more likely (to restore the peace of the nation) would it not be, vigorously to execute the laws against incendiaries? Against those, who by spreading all manner of lies, inflame the people even to madness." But I would recommend to the reader the perusal of the whole passage; for it is curious, and worth reading.—It has long been thought by many, that you

are no enemy to Popery; and in truth it may be conjectured, from the spirit discoverable at the close of your pamphlet, that you have no aversion to the doctrine of *wholesome severities*; I mean when employed against others; for as your old friend Dr. Warburton long ago observed, you are no great friend to persecution, when it approaches your own person. However, when we consider your declaration at the beginning of your performance, that you would not hurt either party in the least degree, nay, that you would not willingly give them the least pain, and compare it with the malignant spirit which you afterwards discover, one might be somewhat tempted to suspect, that you are not badly formed for an Inquisitor.

You are not, it seems, quite sanguine with respect to the success of your scheme; you are not certain that the wholesome severities you recommend would answer the intended purpose. "It is possible (you say) this might restore peace; but one cannot affirm it would." You are right. The prosecution of libellers, or those whom  
crown

erown lawyers, and men of mean and servile principles, would chuse to call so, will never convince the people of the rectitude of the measures of administration; and be assured, that your project is very ill adapted to the purpose of quieting the minds of a brave, a generous, and an incensed people.

It is true, that you talk of prosecuting those who "spread all manner of lies;" but I dare say you are not unacquainted, that if an unfortunate author, printer, or bookseller, should be prosecuted in the court of King's-Bench for any thing that Mr. Attorney General may chuse to stile a libel, it will be of very little impottance whether the assertions contained in such publication be true or false. If it make any difference, there being too much truth in the production will only encrease its criminality: for that is the modern doctrine upon this subject.

If, therefore, your seasonable hint respecting the vigorous prosecution of libellers should be adopted by the proper persons, and aided by the Mansfieldian doctrine

trine of libels, it may, if the people will submit to it, contribute something towards suppressing the Liberty of the Press, which many of our righteous ministers have long considered as an evil of the first magnitude: but which, if the inhabitants of this country ever suffer to be wrested from them, they will from that moment cease to have any pretensions to the character of a free people.

It is, however, impossible that any thing like a Free Press can subsist long in this country, if once crown prosecutions for political publications become frequent, and the modern doctrine concerning libels be generally admitted; by which we are deprived of all protection from a jury of our countrymen, who are rendered mere cyphers, or at most nothing but instruments to execute other men's malice. It is maintained, that jurymen, in libel causes, are bound to convict upon the mere evidence of publication, though they are in no respect convinced of any criminality in the production, or of any evil intent in the publisher: of which, it seems, they are  
not

not competent judges. It is just, we are told, to punish at discretion any bookseller or printer, for selling or printing libels; though twelve jurymen, even of the best rank, assisted and enlightened by the pleadings of counsel, are incapable of determining what a libel is. If it be so, the situation of booksellers and printers must be exceedingly perilous. But I hope my countrymen, when they act as jurymen, will never be weak enough to be induced, by the infamous sophistry that is generally employed on these occasions, or by any other means, to give up their right of determining what is called the law, as well as the fact, in libel causes; the innocence or criminality of the book or paper, as well as the fact of publication. Jurymen have a right to try the whole matter in issue before them, and they are guilty of treachery to their country if they give up this right: for on the maintenance of this the Liberty of the Press essentially depends, with which the preservation of all our other rights is most evidently connected. For the Freedom of the Press, and the Liberty of the People, will stand or fall together.

You

You have not, Sir, it is true, entered into these matters: but your recommendation of the prosecution of libellers naturally brought them to remembrance. And if any regard should be paid to this hint of your's, which is not impossible, as the most pernicious advice is sometimes preferred to the most salutary, it will then be the more necessary that every man eligible to the office of juryman should understand the extent of his own power, and what his countrymen have a right to expect from him. And, indeed, when we see lawyers of the highest rank exerting their abilities, not in the maintenance of law and justice, but in quibbling away the most important and essential rights of the people, it is then time for every man who wishes well to his country, to be upon his guard.

I have already, Sir, extended my letter to a greater length than I intended, and must therefore now take my leave of you. But I shall first observe, that I am sorry to see you, at this advanced period of life, going out of the proper business of your character and profession, to varnish over the

the most iniquitous measures of a corrupt administration, and to support the cause of ministerial tyranny and oppression. As to the professions of impartiality with which you set out, they must, after a perusal of your pamphlet, appear ridiculous even to your own party. It were, however, to have been wished, that you had contented yourself with throwing out the worst reflections you could against the friends of freedom and the constitution, without at the same time insinuating the most pernicious and inflammatory advice to your Sovereign. And it had been well if, when you were making so many artful pretences to meekness and moderation, you had discovered somewhat more fairness in your reasoning, and a little more regard to justice and to candour. As to myself, I believe I have by no means treated your performance with more severity than it merited; and that I have no occasion to make any apology on that head. I shall, therefore, conclude with observing, that as I cannot help considering the enemies of the cause of public freedom as the enemies of my country, I think it at all times justifiable

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fiable to oppose the votaries and defenders  
of unconstitutional and despotic Ministers,  
of whatever rank, character, or profes-  
sion.

I am,

S I R,

Your, &c.

7 JUNE

F I N I S.









