

From the Morning Chronicle.

TO THE MINISTERS AND OFFICE-BEARERS OF THE WESLEYAN METHODIST SOCIETIES IN MANCHESTER.

[We give below an admirable Letter addressed to the Wesleyan-Methodists of England, by Mr. O'Connell, on the occasion of their opposing the system of national education established in England and Ireland. His positions respecting the bible being an all-sufficient guide in religion, are worthy of being examined by every thinking Protestant.]

London, July 6, 1839.

"We hold the faith our fathers held to God."

REV. SIRS AND GENTLEMEN—There appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* of the 2d of June an advertisement, headed "National Education," containing a manifesto on that important subject, addressed by you to your representatives in Parliament.

I do not at all dispute your right to address your representatives on matter of such great interest; but whilst I admit that right, I feel bound to dispute the propriety of the manner in which you so remonstrated. It seems to me that the contents of your remonstrances do not exhibit any great stock of Christian knowledge, and that they are still more deficient in Christian charity.

To avoid all possibility of misstating your sentiments, I will give them in your very words. They are these:—

"We most decidedly object to the intended scheme on the strong grounds of conscience, and of our right to full religious liberty."

"We protest against being taxed for the teaching and maintenance of systems of religion which we, in common with the vast majority of our fellow-countrymen, believe to be false and injurious."

"We protest more especially against our being compelled to support schools in which it is proposed to use versions of the Holy Scriptures notoriously corrupt and unfaithful, and accompanied by notes which we consider contain the most absurd and pernicious doctrines."

"We think it would be an infringement, on our rights, as a large and influential religious community, that after having paid a considerable portion of the money expended in national education, it would be impossible that the children of Wesleyan Methodists should avail themselves of its advantages without being subjected to the dangers arising from the exhibition of rival sects contending for rival versions of the Bible, and from the spirit of doubt, if not of absolute infidelity, in which that exhibition would be so likely to result."

I have several objections to this manifesto of yours. The first is, your claim to be considered friendly to the principle of full religious liberty.

It is an excellent principle: but, I repeat, you have no claim or right to be considered friendly to it. On the contrary, its assertion in your mouths sounds so exceedingly like hypocrisy, that I would respectfully caution you not to use it any more. And for this simple reason—that the Wesleyan Methodists, in the person of their founder, and from his days, have up-

on all occasions shown themselves the enemies of freedom of conscience.

I speak of the great body of the Wesleyan Methodists. There have, of course, been individual exceptions, and some highly honorable ones; but my accusation is directed against the great and overwhelming majority of the Wesleyan Methodists.

Look to the history of your sect, society, or persuasion, or whatever name you may choose to call it, and you will find that such history justifies and proves the truth of my accusation. In the first place, the Protestant dissenters of England, for nearly half a century after the organization of your society, were oppressed by penal and restrictive laws for conscience sake. And whilst they were seeking for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, you, the Wesleyan Methodists, never assisted them in that holy struggle. At least, if you did, the fact never reached me. On the contrary, you at least appeared, if you were not really, amongst the ardent supporters of the enemies of the English Protestant dissenters.

I know that in the year 1828, when the Catholics of Ireland unanimously and powerfully petitioned for perfect freedom of conscience for the English Protestant dissenters, you did not, as we did, mingle in the fight, or become entitled to share in the glory of the victory.

Secondly, in the long struggle the Catholics of Ireland made for the abolition of the laws that infringed freedom of conscience, you never gave us any assistance. On the contrary, you were found in the adverse ranks, active, persevering, virulent!

How can you, then, think of claiming to yourselves the Christian epithet "Friends of freedom of conscience?"

In the third place, you would have departed widely, indeed, from the principles of the remarkable man who formed your society, if you were not active enemies of freedom of conscience, as your founder, the Rev. John Wesley, exhibited the most ardent, but melancholy zeal in the cause of intolerance. He was, in 1779, one of the principal founders or managers of that "Protestant Association," which in June 1780, very nearly achieved the destruction of London, by one of those insurrections which are in the present day called *emeutes*. The Protestant mob had, it is well known, possession of the city of London for nearly six days—destroyed not only the houses of the Catholics and their property, but the Catholic chapels, and also much Protestant property, as well as the prisons of the metropolis. The great instigator of that Protestant Association, both in the pulpit and through the press, was that Wesley whose name you bear; and the first page of your political history is stained with the blunderings, the burnings, the destruction of property, the bloodshed, and the fearful insurrection of June 1780.

In the fourth place, you are unable (and perhaps you are unwilling) to shrink from the avowal of the guilt of John Wesley in these transactions. The insurrection commenced on the 2d June 1780, the day that the Protestant Association presented their petition to parliament. On the 17th of February in that year, that very associ-

ation presented their unanimous thanks to John Wesley for his exertions in their cause. But what I think is the worst feature in the entire of his conduct is, his having afterwards, and after the insurrection was put down, audacity (which I hope will never have a parallel) actually to publish and argue that this insurrection for destruction of Catholic property, Catholic places of worship, and Catholic lives, was nothing less than a *POPISH PLOT*!!!

Thus, Wesleyan Methodists, do I disprove of your claim to be deemed friends of freedom of conscience. My advice to you is, to abandon the wretched pretence in future. Avow yourselves friends of intolerance, and, if you dare, of persecution; but do not outrage common sense and Christian sentiment, by affecting to be favorable to religious liberty.

Such is my first objection to your manifesto; the suggestion of your being what you are not.

Yet I am quite ready to applaud the principle you put forward in that manifesto. Where it is applicable to you, I am quite content you should have the benefit of it. You protest against the tax for the teaching and maintenance of systems of religion which you believe to be false and injurious. Oh, how heartily do I thank you, good Wesleyan Methodists, for the principle! What a blow it gives to the payment of church-rates by Protestant dissenters, or Roman Catholics in England! What a heavy blow you give to the Protestant establishment in Ireland! How heartily do I thank you for the excellent principle you thus put forward!

But come, be honest! Work out your own principle. No man should be taxed for the teaching and maintenance of a religion he deems false and injurious. Let the Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Independent, Baptist, and Catholic have the benefit of it. It applies to all. Will you work it out for all.

But no! you will claim it for yourselves—you will not grant it to others. "What you would that other men should do unto you, that you will not do unto them."

To justify your conduct in a moral point of view, all that is necessary is directly to contradict the plain precept of holy writ.

"We will now proceed to your biblical knowledge. The words you use are these:—

"We protest most especially against our being compelled to support schools in which it is proposed to use versions of the Holy Scriptures notoriously corrupt and unfaithful, and accompanied by notes which we consider, contain most absurd and pernicious doctrines."

I will begin with the notes. And my conviction is, that not one amongst you ever read the notes of the Catholic version of the Holy Scriptures in modern use. It is quite true that there was an edition of the Rhemish or Douay Bible, that contained notes in which the civil power was sought to be justified in inflicting persecution for religious dissent. But there are, indeed, very few copies in existence containing such notes; and all the copies in use by the clergy, or in use in Catholic schools, colleges, or private houses, are

quite free from any such notes. The multitudinous copies published in England and Ireland in recent times, are quite free from them. Indeed, even if they existed, the complaint against them would come with a very bad grace from the Wesleyan Methodists, who, as far as the more liberal spirit of the present period will allow, countenance the principle of religious persecution. But the Catholics, one and all, have repudiated these notes and the doctrines they contain. No man ever repudiated and condemned them more loudly than I did, and do. The complaint, therefore, that you make against notes that no longer for any practical purpose exist, appears to me to be idle and frivolous, and quite unworthy of being introduced into any discussion upon so important a subject as national education.

The next allegation of your's, to which I object, is, that the Catholic version of the Holy Scriptures is notoriously corrupt and unfaithful. In this you display nothing but a lamentable ignorance. You have made a charge which you can never prove, and which you would be ashamed to make if you had biblical learning adequate to the importance of the subject. You would then have known that such a charge applies, not to the Catholic, but to the Protestant version; and that whilst many Protestant divines have borne their testimony in favor of the Catholic version, many learned Protestants, as well as all Catholic divines, have demonstrated the errors in the Protestant authorized version; to this extent, that some of those errors, upon most important points of religious belief, are admitted by learned Protestants to be manifest, and yet remain to this day uncorrected. Let me put you in possession of a few facts. It may be of use to you to know them.

First—That the first great use made of the press, after the invention of the art of printing, was the publication, by the celebrated Faust, of the Bible according to the Vulgate. The edition was very large.—It was however, in Latin; but you should know that at that period almost every person who could read understood Latin.—This publication took place more than 70 years before the so-called "Reformation."

Second—That about 800 editions of the Bible or New Testament were printed and circulated in Catholic Europe before the so-called Reformation, and before the name of Protestant was known in the world.

Third—A number, exceeding 200, of these editions, were in the vernacular tongues of the different countries in which they were published; and were thus accessible to every body who could read.

Fourth—These editions of the Bible in the vernacular tongues were almost exclusively published in the countries that afterwards continued faithful to Catholicity; whilst in England, Scotland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, where Protestantism acquired an early, and has maintained a more lasting, ascendancy, no bible existed, in the national tongue, until after they had embraced the new creed.

Fifth—That the only exception in favor