

CUSTOMS OF THE UNITED STATES.

LETTERS OF LILIAN CHING, TO HIS BROTHERS IN THE ISLAND OF LOO-CHOO; WRITTEN DURING HIS RESIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES.

LETTER III.

Mount Discovery, 9th month, 1825.

You will be amazed on learning how early the military spirit, the spirit of violence and murder, is infused into the minds of children by christian parents—and how continually this spirit is cultivated, throughout the land. No sooner are little boys able to go alone, than many of them are furnished with miniature swords or guns, and taught their use. They are also taught to look forward to the time, when, by weapons of death, they will acquire renown! For boys of a larger size, Military Academies or Fencing Schools, are provided, in which various modes of manslaughter are scientifically taught, and the young imbued with a thirst for fighting glory. Indeed no exertions, no expense, and no applause, are spared to keep alive the love of military fame. I have sometimes attended their public trainings, and reviews, and have witnessed what are called *Sham-fights*, designed to familiarize the minds of the young, to the idea of killing one another.

Can you believe that an intelligent people are so bewildered as to suppose that these are the surest means of preventing war? Such, however is the fact. At least, so it is said, and I believe truly; for it is asserted by some of the most eminent men in the country.

But from such an education, I should suppose that wars would very naturally result; and that murder, in various forms, would abound in the land. Nor am I surprised to see the weekly and daily newspapers of this country, much occupied with horrid accounts of murders. They appear to me to be the genuine fruits of the seed so industriously sown. Besides there is in this country, a privileged class of people denominated "Gentlemen of Honor," who for trivial offences, will fight one another, according to established rules—generally with pistols, but sometimes with muskets or swords. Such murderous combats, by way of eminence, are called "affairs of honor." In this way, many lose their lives, and bring great distress on their families. As barbarous and abominable as this practice is, there is not virtue enough in the land to effect its abolition. Nor is it probable that it ever will be abolished while the more atrocious custom of public war shall retain its popularity.

Within thirty years, all the nations of Christendom have been at war with each other, and in some of their battles, from ten thousand to eighty thousand men have been found dead at the close of a conflict, and it is probable that the number of wounded was greater than that of the slain! Surely, if the God of the Christians is delighted with such scenes of violence, and horror among his children, he must be more malignant than any evil being known to the people of Loo Choo. I may add, if the Christian Messiah is a promoter of such strife, or if the religion authorizes and encourages such deeds, the people of our Island have great reason to be thankful for their ignorance of Christianity.

It is however possible that the majority of Christians have been under a mistake in respect of the character of their God, their Messiah, and the religion he came to establish. I have already seen some Christians, who are, like our Islanders, of a pacific disposition. These peaceful men assure me that I cannot with any propriety, judge of the nature of their religion from the warring character of Christian nations. They also affirm, that if the precepts of Jesus Christ, had been duly regarded by all who have assumed the name of Christians, I should never have heard of fighting Christians. When I shall have thoroughly examined their New Testament, I may be better able to inform you respecting the correctness of this opinion. On disputed points, I have often observed the minority to have the right of the question. I hope it will be found so in this case; for to me, it is shocking to think of a God who can be pleased with hatred and war, robbery, murder, and devastation among his rational offspring.

I believe it to be a fact, that men are much influenced by the views they entertain of their God, whether correct or false. Men who believe that their God is pleased with wars and fightings, will very naturally become warriors, and the contrary belief will produce an opposite effect. I lately observed in the Essays of Lord Bacon, a great man of England, the following remarks:—"It were better to have no idea of God at all than such as are unworthy of him." He quotes Plutarch, a heathen philosopher, as supporting the same opinion by saying, "Surely I had much rather men should say there was no such man at all as Plutarch, than to say, there was one Plutarch that would eat his children as soon as they were born." If the Christians' God is a good being, I am sure that fighting Christians entertain such ideas as are "unworthy of him." But I am not certain which is the more inhuman, for a parent to "eat his children as soon as they are born," or to educate them for butchers of their species. In my view, both practices are horrible and beneath the dignity of a rational being.

L. C.

LETTER IV.

Mount Discovery, 10th month, 1825.

I had not been long in America before I discovered in this people, a remarkable propensity to boast of their liberty, civil and religious. They call their country the land of freedom, and too often speak of it, as the most free if not the only free country in the world. What is still worse, they boast much of their war for liberty. This happened about half a century ago, and was of eight years duration. Many thousands of people perished in the contest, and distress was spread over all the country. Parents were mourning for the loss of children, children for the loss of parents, and wives for the loss of husbands.

Prior to this war, these states were colonies of Great Britain, and Britain was regarded with affection as the *mother country*. Surely it must be a sad thing for children to fight their mother; but so it was in this case; yet the war is now a subject of boasting rather than lamentation. By what I can learn of the affair, there was much blame on both sides. The mother was too arrogant and overbearing, and the children too irritable and violent. The children were fond of tea, and the mother took it into her head to raise a revenue from this inclination. She required that they should pay a duty of three pence a pound on their tea, besides its full value. This the children resented, not so much on account of the magnitude of the duty, as the arbitrary principle on which it was laid. They not only refused to pay the duty, but in a pet destroyed a great quantity of tea, which was sent to them for sale. This was resented by the mother country; and one rash step succeeded another, till open hostilities commenced; the scenes which followed are too horrible to be related. The Americans gained their point, and became an independent nation. Since that period, they have been annually glorying in their bloody conflict, and praising the sages and heroes of the Revolution.

During that disastrous struggle, a young French nobleman came to aid the Americans. He was made a general in their army, and was highly esteemed for his services. Since I have been in the country, that general, grey with age, came from France to pay the Americans a visit, and you would have been astonished to see with what parade and acclamation he was received in each of the States.

As a contrast to this, I will tell you another story. Long since the Revolutionary war, this great nation made war on a little tribe of Indians, called Seminoles. Two British subjects happened at that time to be among the Indians, and seeing their distress, were disposed to aid them. The two unfortunate men were taken by the Americans, and their general caused them both to be hanged! If there was any right in either case, the two Britons had as good a right to aid the distressed Indians, as the Frenchman had to aid the distressed Americans; yet this people have been so inconsistent as to praise the Frenchman and hang the Britons for similar conduct! Some, indeed, blamed the general for hanging the two Britons; but the government probably stood in some awe of the general, or was unwilling to punish a man who had acquired glory by slaughtering his thousands of brethren in time of war. There is still another inconsistency in this people, equally glaring. Notwithstanding all their professed love of liberty, and their fighting for it, they have now almost two millions of their fellow men in absolute slavery who are held as property, to be bought and sold like brute beasts. When I see such glaring disregard of the rights of others, among Christians, who profess a love of liberty, and who evidently understand the rights of men, I cannot but suspect that their wars may be as inconsistent with the principles of their religion as their slaveholding is with their avowed principles of civil freedom.

I ought, however, to say, that there is a great diversity of character among this people. Some of them deeply deplore the inconsistency which I have just stated. They not only see, but feel, that the slaves have much more cause to complain of the tyranny exercised towards them, than ever their masters had to complain of the wrongs of Britain. But the majority of the people are either in favor of slaveholding, or so indifferent about it, that little is done towards its abolition. Many fear that by delaying to remedy the evil, the volcano will explode and overwhelm the country with desolating lava.

L. C.

CHARITY.

Pure in her aim, and in her temper mild,
Her wisdom seems the weakness of a child;
She makes excuses where she might condemn,
Reviled by those that hate her, prays for them;
Suspicion lurks not in her artless breast,
The worst suggested, she believes the best;
Not soon provoked, however stung and teased,
And, if perhaps made angry, soon appeased;
She rather waives than will dispute her right,
And injured, makes forgiveness her delight.

Cowper's Charity,

A PROMISE "IN FUTURO."—A president of the parliament of Paris, when presenting an address to the duke of Burgundy, then an infant, said, "We come to offer you our respects; our children will give you their services."

Selected from "Lacon."

SUGGESTIONS TO THE THINKING.

I.

With respect to the authority of great names, it should be remembered, that he alone deserves to have any weight or influence with posterity who has shewn himself superior to the particular and predominant error of his own times;—who like the peak of Teneriffe, has hailed the intellectual sun, before its beams have reached the horizon of common minds;—who, standing like Socrates on the apex of wisdom, has removed from his eyes all film of earthly dross, and has foreseen a purer law, a nobler system, a brighter order of things,—in short a promised land! which like Moses on the top of Pisgah, he is permitted to survey, and anticipate for others, without being himself allowed either to enter, or to enjoy it.

II.

The drafts which true genius draws upon posterity, although they may not always be honoured as soon as they are due, are sure to be paid with compound interest in the end. Milton's expressions on his right to this remuneration, constitute some of the finest efforts of his mind. He never alludes to these high pretensions, but he appears to be animated by an eloquence, which is at once both the plea and the proof of their justice; an eloquence, so much above all present and all perishable things, that, like the beams of the sun, it warms while it enlightens, and as it descends from heaven to earth, raises our thoughts from earth to heaven. When the great Kepler had at length discovered the harmonic laws that regulate the motions of the heavenly bodies, he exclaimed, "Whether my discoveries will be read by posterity, is a matter that concerns them more than me. I may be well contented to wait one century for a reader, when God himself, during so many thousand years, has waited for an observer like myself."

III.

None are so fond of secrets as those who do not mean to keep them; such persons covet secrets as a spendthrift covets money for the purpose of circulation.

IV.

Some Scientists have discovered a short path to celebrity. Having heard that it is a vastly silly thing to believe every thing, they take it for granted that it must be a vastly wise thing to believe nothing. They therefore set up for free-thinkers; but their only stock in trade is, that they are free from thinking. It is not so easy to condemn them, nor very easy to convince them; since no persons make so large a demand upon the reason of others, as those who have none of their own; as a highwayman will take greater liberties with our purse, than our banker.

V.

Men are born with two eyes, but with one tongue, in order that they should see twice as much as they say; but from their conduct, one would suppose that they were born with two tongues, and one eye, for those talk the most who have observed the least, and intrude their remarks upon every thing, who have seen the least of nothing.

VI.

Agur said, "Give me neither poverty nor riches"; and this will ever be the prayer of the wise. Our incomes should be like our shoes; if too small, they will gall and pinch us; but if too large they will cause us to stumble and to trip. But wealth after all is a relative thing; since he that has little, and wants less, is richer than he that has much, but wants more. True contentment depends not upon what we have, but upon what we would have; a tub was large enough for Diogenes, but a world was too little for Alexander.

VII.

Were a plain unlettered man, but endowed with common sense and a certain quantum of observation and of reflection, to read over attentively the four Gospels, and the acts of the Apostles, without any note or comment, I hugely doubt whether it would enter into his ears to hear, his eyes to see, or his heart to conceive the purport of many ideas signified by many words ending in *ism*, which, nevertheless, have cost Christendom rivers of ink, and oceans of blood.

VIII.

No men deserve the title of infidels so little as those to whom it has been usually applied; let any of those who renounce Christianity, write fairly down in a book all the absurdities that they believe instead of it, and they will find that it requires more faith to reject Christianity, than to embrace it.

AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE.—Having the Bible in our hands, we ought to examine it for ourselves, and not to trust to the mere *ipse dixit* of any man whatever. Nor should we exalt any human teacher, only so far as he conducts us to a clearer discernment of the truth it contains. We ought to have no head but Jesus Christ, nor any principles of either faith or practice but what are purely scriptural. If the members of the different sects gain no information from their favourite leaders, but what they can equally receive through the medium of the Bible; and if the different leaders in religion procured all their evangelical tenets, mediately through sacred Scripture from God; if they can even point out the various texts that teach their several principles, why in this case do they hold under man, at second hand, what they acknowledge to be long primarily to God, and what they must shew to be his before they can expect their doctrine to be received as gospel truth? And why, as they all profess to believe every part of the Bible to be equally true, does each sect condemn every other for holding such tenets as square not with its own narrowed system? Is it not notorious that, whatever one sect maintains, another most avowedly opposes? They cannot all be right: they are possibly, to a very considerable degree, all wrong; and it will hereafter be found that Sectarianism is destructive of all true religion. It will be wise therefore to turn from erring man entirely to the Bible to learn, profess and practice, under God, all its truths and precepts. And let every one, who professes the name of Christ, proclaim himself simply a "Bible Christian." If it be asked whether the Bible be really different from the interpretations put upon it by the various denominations of professing Christians, it may be answered: were it not so, how could all the sects find Scripture in direct refutation of each other's notions? And how could the Bible, consistent in itself, sanction all, and refuse all, did they not, in different points, misunderstand it?—Rev. William Cowherd.