



Our are the Plans of our delightful Peace,
Mourning by Party Rage to live like Brothers.

THE FOLLOWING LETTER

Was written by a most excellent man long deceased, but as his sentiments are calculated to do away prejudice against Names, it does not appear unreasonable to reprint it.

SIR, MEN boast of their reason, and might justly, if they used it freely, and applied it properly; but considering that generally in their moral conduct, they are guided by such reasons as are a shame and a contradiction to reason, it seems to be thrown away upon them: Indeed, so little, or so wrong, is the use they make of it, that it would be really for their reputation, if they had none.

But though the many scarcely use it at all, and none so much as they ought; yet every man thinks he does, and never wants something which he calls reason, for the justification of his folly or wickedness. Prejudice or passion steps into its room, takes its name; and under the appearance of reason, does things which reason abhors: And thus reason, as well as religion, is forced to furnish its enemies with arms against itself, and the abuse of it is worse and more dangerous than the absolute want of it; as an idiot is less terrible and less odious than a knave, and as a harmless Pagan is a much more amiable character than an outrageous persecuting Bigot. So that as no Religion at all is better than a mischievous Religion; that is to say, any Religion that prompts men to hurt one another; so the absence or inactivity of the faculties, is better than the quickness of faculties wickedly applied.

Of all the many false lights that mislead men from their reason, prejudice is one of the foremost and most successful; and though in their natures, or more destructive of each other, than reason and prejudice are; yet they are often made to pass for each other: And as some men will give you very good reasons for their being in the wrong themselves; there are those too, who will give you as good, why others should not be in the right; that is, the prejudices of some would be thought wisdom, and the wisdom of others is mis-called prejudice. The worst things that men do, called by a good name, pass for the best; and the best, blackened by an ill name, pass for the worst. Such is the force of prejudice in the world, and so successfully does this foe to reason ape reason!

Prejudice is an obdurate and unreasonable attachment to an opinion, supported only by a wilfulness to maintain it, whether regarding men or things; it links the good with the bad, and the bad with the good, and hates or loves by the lump. Thus if a man is called a saint, his worst actions are faint with him; and his very ignorance and cruelty, and even his dirtiness and his dreams, are made sacred and meritorious; as may be seen at large in the Romish Legends, where the principal qualification for sainthood seems to have consisted in stark raving madness, and in an implacable and bloody fury towards all sense and sobriety. And thus, even with us, if a man passes for a good man, his bad deeds are often thought good ones, by those that think him so, and only because do they think him so.

On the other side, if a man is called an Atheist, the odium of that name, where it is believed true, is made a blot upon his best actions and greatest virtue, and to defeat them as well as foil them. For my own part, I cannot think there are such men as Atheists; but if there were, I cannot think that truth and sobriety in an Atheist, are worse than in another man. That black is not white, and that two and two make four; is as true out of the mouth of an Atheist, as out of the

mouth of an apostle: A penny given by an Atheist to a beggar, is better alms than a halfpenny given by a believer; and the good sense of an Atheist is preferable to the mistakes of a good Christian: In short, whatever reputed Atheists do well, or speak truly, is more to be imitated and credited, than what the greatest believers do wickedly, or say falsely; and even in the business of bearing testimony, or making a report, in which cases the credit and reputation of the witness gives some weight, or none, to what he says; more regard is to be had to the word of an unbeliever who has no interest on either side, than to the word of a believer who has.

So that as no man is to be believed an Atheist, unless he be evidently proved one; which, where he himself denies it, can be done by God only; so neither are the good or bad actions of an Atheist worse, with respect to the world, at least for his being one; though the sin of a faint is more sinful than that of a Pagan. As it is therefore the blackest and most barbarous villainy to charge any man with Atheism, who is no Atheist; it is the greatest folly to think that any man's crimes are the less, for the name of him that commits them; or that truth is less or more truth, for the ill or good name of him that speaks it.

Prejudice has long taught men, contrary to all reason, to think otherwise; and to consider, not what was done or said; but who were the men that said or did it. A happy expedient, I must own, to acquire dominion, and to exercise it; and to keep, for that end, mankind ignorant and base, as their teachers and governors do generally keep them! And therefore, in most parts of the world, truth is a capital crime; and the Pope and Mahomet, the Alcoran and the Mass-book, and the like soundings, with a competent assistance of fire and sword, are sufficient to convince and govern all true Catholics and Musselmens.

But we live in a land of liberty; and have, I hope, well-nigh wiped off the scandal of being led or animated by noise and names, as were many of our forefathers; whose reason being in other men's keeping, was generally turned upon them, and co-operated with other causes, towards keeping them in bondage. They were decoyed or frightened into folly and chains; some saw not their condition, and others wanted courage or power to mend it. But with Liberty light has sprung in, and we have got rid of the terrors and delusion occasioned by solemn and ill-sounding names; a sort of bugbears that frighten only in the dark: We have learned that we are as fit to use our own understandings, as they are whose understandings are no better than ours; and that there is no merit in sounds, nor in those actions which a wicked man may practise as well as a good man, without departing from his character.

True learning and prejudices cannot subsist together; and therefore, though in societies of pedants, little else is to be found but prejudices, bitterness, ignorance, and ill-breeding; I am amazed to hear, that in societies of gentlemen, formed for the promoting of knowledge, and liberty of enquiry, a province utterly inconsistent with the narrow spirit of prejudice, there are yet found instances of the greatest. Who would imagine, that natural complexion or religious opinions, could any way affect the discovery of fossils and cockle shells, or the improvement of mustard and pickles? But I dare say, it is only a story raised to bring a learned body into contempt, that they refused admittance to one Philosopher, because he held heterodox religious tenets, and another because of his foreign extraction.

If it were true, it would justify the jest made upon them by a gentleman, who being asked by some of them, Whether he had a mind to be a member? told them, 'No, gentlemen, 'tis impossible; you see I have a mole on my upper lip; and I am subject to talk in my sleep.'

It is scarce credible, but that we see it, how violently and shamefully prejudice flies in the face of reason, and often gets the better of it, in instances too where reason seems to be strongest and most obvious. I shall mention a remarkable one.

Alexander and Cæsar are never mentioned but with applause, or thought of but as amiable characters; and the true patterns of princes and heroes, though it is certain there never lived more wicked men; they turned the world upside down, and usurped its power; they paved their way to dominion with dead bodies, and were the oppressors and butchers of the human race: Here is fact, plain undeniable fact, against prejudice and opinion.

Oliver Cromwel, on the contrary, is scarce ever mentioned but with detestation, or thought of but as a monster; though it is certain that he never did the hundredth part of the mischief that was done by either of the other two. He had at least as good a right to Great-Britain as they had to the globe; and ruled it with more equity and less blood. He was, doubtless, an usurper, but a little one; and though wicked enough, really an innocent man compared to them. Nor was he at all below them in parts and courage. What therefore is the cause of this mighty and unjust difference, where the lesser wickedness is most magnified, and least excused, and where the blackest criminals and the highest usurpers are admired and extolled?

There is yet one effect of prejudice more impious than all the rest; I mean, the daring presumption of those men who wantonly apply the judgments of God to others, and of calling those things judgments, which are not so. Probably nothing ever yet happened to one man, but has happened to another, and a different: The wicked live in as much prosperity, and die with as few agonies as do the righteous, who, I think, are allowed to be here much the more unhappy of the two. Who has told us, what God can only tell, that misfortunes are judgments; or that death is one; that death which is common to all men? And as to the different and disastrous manners of dying; have not fire and sword, famine and pestilence, poison and torture, wild beasts and accidents, destroyed as many good men as evil men?

How foolish and insolent are we! When we are angry, unreasonably angry with one another, we presumptuously think that God, the good and all-wise God, is so too; by which we profanely suggest, that he is a Being as weak, ridiculous, and passionate, as ourselves. Whereas that often pleases God, which is hated by man, and that which is really a blessing is often thought a curse; and therefore some wickedly think the judgment of God due to others for things that entitle them rather to God's favour. So wickedly do men differ in their sentiments and affections!

They who call the misfortunes of others judgments upon them, do plainly enough own, though not in words, that they wish for judgments upon others, or are glad when they happen. What can we say of such an Antichristian Spirit as this?

When the heathens were uppermost, they charged the Christians with being the cause of all the evils and misfortunes that befel the Roman Empire, such as inundations, plagues, earthquakes, and the like; and one of the Fathers wrote a book to prove, that all those things had

been from the beginning; and whoever makes the like charges now against any man, or body of men, may be silenced, if he has modesty, sense, or shame in him, by the same answer.

EXTRACTS

From an Oration on the Extent and Power of POLITICAL DELUSION; Delivered in New-Haven, Connecticut, on the evening preceding the public Commencement, September, 1800.

BY ABRAHAM BISHOP.

Most of the delusions which I have named to you will be practised on you at the approaching Presidential election, and then delusion ever busy and inventive will assume new and potent forms proportioned to the immense importance of that occasion. Some candidates will be proposed to you, whose whole system consists of the delusions which, I have explained. But was our revolution achieved? Did the great God guide the storm in order to land us in the joyful harbor of peace and freedom and is the whole scene to be clouded with the bursting of crackers, and raising of sky-rockets? Republicans be awake, the day is more important than any day of your revolution.

Now republicanism dies or lives forever. Your candidate is a tried patriot and statesman. It is not the atheist Jefferson; not the infamous discoverer of a standard of weights and measures, by the vibrations of a pendulum; not the author of the letter to Mazzei. Federalists need not apprehend that such a man is to be held up; but your candidate is Jefferson, President of the Philosophical society, who in all his communications to them has spoken reverently of the goodness of God, tee man, who in his writings has spoken reverently of the christian religion, and has for years supported at his own expence a preacher of the gospel; a man of unquestionable morality both in theory and practice, amiable in private life, holding the second office in your government by the free suffrages of the people. The ingenious discoverer of a perfect standard of weights and measures, and the man who in public as well as private, has dared to publish truths galling to federal ears, has dared to say that we had men, who preferred the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty; that we had an aristocratic, monarchic, Britannic faction in this country.

Knowing accurately the power of delusion, he ventured to predict, that after the war there would be a relapse of spirit in the people: that abuses would creep in and would continue till a crisis, when, by the energy of the people, our rights would revive or till they should expire in a convulsion, and herein he predicted this very day. Our spirit has declined; gross abuses have crept in; we have a powerful aristocratic, monarchic, Britannic faction; but by a due exertion of your constitutional rights of elections, your rights may yet revive, and the man who predicted this lives to receive the testimony of your respect and confidence, the withholding of which may lead you to the sad catastrophe of seeing your dearly earned rights literally expire in a convulsion.

However you may be agitated on the subject of religion; rest assured that you are not to depend on any administration of government for the prosperity of Zion. You will not, like the people of England, expect that examples of piety, issues of grace, and streams of salvation, are to flow from his most sacred Majesty, and the titled slaves which compose a luxurious court. The chariot wheels of salvation are far different from the chariot wheels which are to be rolled round the streets of the Federal city, with loads of domestic and imported infidelity.

Finally, Republicans, be strong; though they who are opposed to you, may say, "we are called legion; for we are many; fear not the numbers." Though they may offer you all the kingdoms of the world in consideration of your submission; though they may say, "follow us, and ye shall be called Gods," heed them not: their business is to delude you. Singular as it may seem, though you have been called infidels; yet you have to combat systems destructive to religion; though you have been called jacobins; yet you have to contend for that equal rational freedom, which no jacobin ever fought; though you have been called infernals, yet you have enemies to fight; which the ancient church had; you have to contend with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places, with the prince of the power of the air at the head of them. Though a government, which you equally obtained and equally support, has been directed both in language and laws against your feelings, liberties and rights; you have waited peaceably; though impatiently for the day of your constitutional deliverance.

Soon will your prison doors be set open; the day to redeem yourselves from great and little tyrants, is at hand. If you have firmness to meet the crisis, and faithfully to act your parts in it, you may shout, for your redemption is at the door.

But, if in any of you present, delusion has wrought its perfect work: if you have bowed the knee to the political Baal; then bid an eternal adieu to the freedom you never merited; prepare your necks for the yoke.

THE FOLLOWING CHARACTER OF THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT,

Taken from Belsham's Memoirs of the Kings of Great Britain.

"Since the establishment of this (Walpole's) system of corruption, which has descended to us in its full force, the deliberations of Parliament are become little better than the conflicts of faction, or the empty forms of freedom."

"Parliaments, which ought to exhibit an unclouded display of wisdom, integrity, and benevolence, combined in one illustrious assemblage, is virtually degraded to a court convened only for the purpose of enregistering the Royal edicts."

"It is not the grave and well weighed counsels of the legislature, which, under this system, direct the movements of the executive power; but it is the caprice, the pride, and the folly of the executive power, which have too frequently influenced and governed the volitions of the legislative body. It is an acknowledged truth, a truth upon parliamentary record, that "The influence of the Crown ought to be diminished;" but no vigorous steps have been taken to effect that diminution."

"A reform of the representation, a reduction of the standing military force, a progressive redemption of the public debt, and a total abolition of all useless and superfluous places, pensions, and sinecures, upon which the monster Corruption feeds and thrives, are alone adequate to accomplish the mighty task of a national regeneration."

"And if that energy and virtue are wanting in the community at large, which will in time incite to the adoption of such means as are necessary to effectuate this end, what remains but to await, in deep and tranquil silence, the moment in which the national liberty is fated finally to terminate in that absolute monarchy, which, according to a profound and celebrated writer, forms the true enthralment of the British Constitution."