

A LETTER

LORD BROUGHAM,

IN REPLY TO

ISAAC TOMKINS, GENT.

AND

MR. PETER JENKINS.

BY

JOHN RICHARDS, ESQ. M.P.

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A
L E T T E R,

&c.

MY LORD,

Two or three days ago, my attention was directed, by a friend of mine, to two little pamphlets, published under the names of *Isaac Tomkins* and *Peter Jenkins*; but generally (and, I am convinced, truly) ascribed to the pen of your Lordship. In one of these pamphlets, your Lordship has thought fit to mention my name. And you have done this, it seems, in reference to the course which, on a late occasion, I thought it my duty to take in Parliament. But, independent of your personal and wholly unprovoked attack on me, you have, by means

of these tracts, and your observations on them in the *Edinburgh Review*, endeavoured, mischievously and dangerously, as it appears to me, to influence the public mind on a most important question; and this gives me some right to make a few remarks on them.

But, first, let me ask your Lordship, how, amidst the multifarious and opposite pursuits, some great and some small, in which you are engaged,—as a judge,—a senator,—a schoolmaster,—a reviewer,—and a writer of two-penny tracts,—how comes it that your Lordship's notice has fallen upon me? I have not been raised to distinction by any one, whose character and power I afterwards endeavoured to subvert. I have neither betrayed the trust, nor violated the confidence of any party. I am not hated and feared by my political associates as a traitor to them. Nor, after having truckled to the court, do I now teach sedition to the people. It is true, that, for some years, I praised your Lordship for a patriot;—that I thought you learned, and believed you to be disinterested and sincere. But I am not the only

person who has been misled by appearances—who has given credit to the bawling pretensions of trading politicians—or who has mistaken base coin for that which is sterling. Is it because, like many others, I was deceived in your character, that your Lordship thinks me worthy of your censure?

Just before the opening of this Session of Parliament, the Conservatives, for the first time since the passing of the Reform Act, became possessed of power; and Sir Robert Peel, their distinguished leader, considering, no doubt, the great change made by this Act in the constitution of the House of Commons, and earnestly desirous of complying, as far as he safely could, with the wishes of the people, announced his determination to govern the country on the principles of Reform. I gave him credit for sincerity. He demanded a trial, and I determined to give him one. I now ask, whether he has, in any instance, falsified his own declarations, or disappointed the hopes of the country? Even faction itself cannot say that he has done this. How has he exhibited himself? Intrepid

yet calm, abounding in knowledge, rich in experience, indefatigable, in eloquence hardly to be equalled, willing, nay anxious, to grant all useful reforms, and resolute in refusing only such as are mischievous and dangerous,—he stood the Statesman and the Patriot;—a picture of moral and mental greatness, the pride of his friends and the admiration even of his enemies. But his political opponents, irritated by their own dismissal from power, and afraid, perhaps, that if the right hon. Baronet should hold office long, he might, with his splendid abilities, and straight-forward, manly, and patriotic conduct, win “golden opinions” of the people, determined, by any means and at whatever risk, to destroy his ministry. Witness their party-motion on the Speakership! Look at their paltry amendment on the address to the Crown! And, above all, consider their motions on the Irish Church;—pending the inquiry of their own commission into the state of that church! When they issued that commission, either they thought an inquiry necessary, or they did not. If they did not, they stand convicted of being public

hypocrites ; if they did, what shall be said of their recent motions ? Were these motions the effect of a mere desire for place ? Did they spring solely from bitter, rancorous, party-spirit ? Or do these *soi-disant* leaders of the Whigs, with their Radical allies, fancy themselves, like the Whigs of a former day, possessed, forsooth, of “all the talents ;” and, therefore, the only proper persons to carry on the government ?

The administration of the Whigs, during the time in which they, lately, held office, notoriously disappointed the hopes and expectations of the nation. Rash, without courage ; timid, without prudence ; feeble, indecisive, irresolute, given to change for the sake merely of change,—advancing a step, and, startled at their own boldness, as hastily retreating,—proceeding on no plan,—guided by no certain or fixed principles,—unacquainted with the details of business,—and unaccustomed to the commonest forms of office,—they were the occasion of anxiety and uneasiness to their friends, and of contempt and mirth to their enemies. Before they acquired

power, much was expected from them. Their opposition to the government had been lively and spirited ; their demeanour bold and fearless. Both in and out of Parliament, they constantly spoke *ad populum*. It is probable, that they did not foresee the consequences of many of the measures which they recommended and urged. Be this as it may, they always appeared as the advocates of popular rights and popular privileges. Whether they believed all they said, or whether the mask of patriotism was worn for the occasion, I will not attempt to determine. It is, however, beyond dispute, that, when in office, they belied their former professions and former conduct ; and not only opposed popular measures themselves, but loudly condemned and vilified those who continued to support them.*

But the Conservatives were again called to direct the councils of the King ; and now, the

* Of course, I speak of the Whigs as a *party*. I have the pleasure to know amongst them many excellent and amiable individuals ; and my animadversions are intended, in no degree, to apply to them.

scene of Whig politics at once changed. Again, they became loud in their invectives against the King's Government ;—again, vehement in their appeals to the people. They affected, piteously, to lament the opportunity they had lost of doing the people good ; and, full of protestations of their present excellent intentions, and lavish of their promises as to the future, they begged to be once more entrusted with power ;—for the sake, and only for the sake, of the country ! And, am I to be denounced by your Lordship, because I did not listen to men like these ? Having been already deceived, was I still to give them my confidence ? But, with your usual accuracy in stating facts, your Lordship says, “ that, at the late election, I vowed to oppose the late ministers, and restore reformers to power.” It might be sufficient, perhaps, for me to assert, that Sir Robert Peel showed us that he is a reformer ;—and that the men whom you eulogize are sham reformers. But my answer is, that, at the election, I exposed to scorn the hollow and despicable conduct of the Whigs ; I said, that I was disappointed in them ; and de-

clared, that, in my opinion, it would be a public misfortune, if they should be restored to power. I said, at the same time, “ that I mistrusted the Tories, and feared the Radicals.” This was before Sir Robert Peel’s two addresses to the electors of Tamworth. And, because I believed Sir Robert Peel, and refused to join in a hypocritical party-crusade to drive him from office, your Lordship, with characteristic regard to truth and candour, and with all that good feeling and good taste which distinguish you, has attempted to brand me as an apostate ! But I proceed to consider the scope and tendency of your Lordship’s two tracts.

It is impossible, I think, for any one who has read these two publications and also the articles written, as I am persuaded, by you, on the same subject, in the last Edinburgh Review, to doubt the intention of your Lordship to degrade, and the tendency of such writings to destroy, the aristocracy of the country. Whether you be actuated by disappointed ambition, restless and dissatisfied because it has failed to obtain supreme power, or whe-

ther, as is more likely still, some wound has been given to that morbid vanity which renders you so vulnerable, I shall not stop to inquire. I can, however, readily imagine, that, in the polished circle to which the favour of your Sovereign introduced you, certain peculiarities of gait and dress, especially if connected with attempts to be *fine*, and an abrupt, dogmatic, and sarcastic manner, irrespective of rank or sex, may have excited ridicule. Undoubtedly, they were not calculated to inspire esteem or conciliate regard. That some real or fancied slight has made you sore is evident; for not even the ladies escape your lash! You appeal, indeed, to our feelings, in the strongest manner, on behalf of females in the middle class of life, whom you represent as slighted and contemned by the class above them. But these latter you caricature in the broadest style. You speak of them as heartless and worthless;—devoid alike of all that deserves esteem, or which ought to excite in us affection and love. “Every female member of this class,” you say, “is under the exclusive dominion of some waiting-maid, or silly lover, or slander-monger-

ing newspaper." You represent them "as capricious and wayward, unreasoning, and often unfeeling, blind to all danger, and alarmed where all is safe; in short, as children, or rather spoiled children." Your attempts at gallantry may, possibly, not always have succeeded; but, supposing that you have been, sometimes, laughed at, is not the language you use rude and unfeeling? You do not, perhaps, excel in those modes of pleasing which win the affections of the gentler sex; but, why, therefore, libel them? No one will deny that you have your useful qualities; and why not be satisfied with the praises they justly gain for you? Why attempt things, for which you are wholly unfit? Your Lordship, perhaps, may remember the fable of the ass, who attempted to imitate the lap-dog.

In the tract, which, under the assumed name of *Isaac Tomkins*, contains your "Thoughts," after expressing your opinion, in a somewhat triumphant manner, that reform is rapidly advancing, and that the present moment is favourable to your purpose of procuring the improve-

ment and remoulding of our institutions in Church and State, you proceed to give us a sketch of the legal rights and privileges of the nobility. Having done this, you labour to prove that, independent of peers and their eldest sons, the aristocracy includes all the younger branches of noble families, and likewise their immediate connexions and acquaintance. You attempt to show the bad consequences of this, and affect to lament the relative disadvantages under which the sons and daughters of the middle class labour. You, studiously, endeavour to sow the seeds of jealousy and envy ;—to excite the anger and ill-will of one class of society against another ;—and, by libelling in the grossest manner the aristocracy, you pander to the worst feelings of human nature. But you assert, that persons of the middle class of life labour under great disadvantages ;—that neither at college, nor when they leave it to mix in the business of the world, do they meet with the same acceptance in aristocratic society (which society, whose *exclusiveness* you bitterly complain of, you represent as no object of desire, and, indeed, below a wise

and good man's notice !) as those do that are born patricians. To use your own words, "that they have to make their way—to win spurs; the others start on a vantage ground—they are born spurred." You then cite the case of a farmer's or shop-keeper's son going to Oxford; and try to persuade us that he has not an equal chance with the son of a man of rank. Now, the fact is, that the middle class of persons, in this country, are most felicitously circumstanced. You are obliged to admit, "that it is a very great advantage of our constitution that nothing prevents men of no birth from gaining this (aristocratic) station by their wealth, and talents, and industry." And you say further, "that the middle class are the part of the nation which is entitled to command respect, and enabled to win esteem or challenge admiration. They read, they reflect, they reason, they think for themselves. They are the nation—the people—in every rational or correct sense of the word. By them, through them, for them, the fabric of the government is reared, continued, designed." And yet, monstrous though it be, you appear to wish to

destroy this happy constitution of society ! O no ! you will exclaim, “ I have no wish to destroy the middle class ; but only the aristocracy.” Why, what egregious inconsistency is this ! In page 18 of your “ Thoughts,” you, in the plenitude of your candour, say, “ Let us here at once admit the grievous error of those who complain that aristocratic society is exclusive, and that the nobles of our land, and their associates, have a refined intercourse among themselves—a luxury which none besides are suffered to taste. Avowed by some, this repining is felt by many more ; but, it is unworthy of sensible men, and fitter for foolish people, just as empty as the patricians, and less accomplished ; in a word, vulgar minds who would fain enter into fine company with the view doubtless of keeping the door shut as soon as it had yawned to let themselves in. Let all who thus feel (reason they do not) reflect how little of what they complain of belongs to aristocracy in the bad sense ; that is, in the only sense in which we have any right to level it or sweep it away. The dukes and marquisses

with their wives and mistresses, their girls and their lads, *would form just as exclusive and as refined a circle were their titles abolished, so they retained their possessions ; and, of course, no man in his senses ever dreamt of levelling the distinctions of property, and thus plucking out the corner-stone from the fabric of society.*"

Again, page 8, you say, "The picture (of aristocratic society) has some features, which would be as revolting as they now are, *even if all artificial distinctions of rank were swept away, as long as the accumulation of property is permitted ;—and with that no man of sense would wish to interfere.*" So then, after all, it seems, that the follies and vices, which are alleged by your Lordship to exist amongst the upper class, are the effect—not of aristocratic distinctions—but of the accumulation of property ;—and with that we have your Lordship's high authority for saying, no man of sense would wish to interfere ;—for that to do so would be to pluck out the corner-stone from the fabric of society. "But the fault," cries your Lordship, "lies in the special privileges which they have of a po-

litical nature. Only see," you exclaim, "how the aristocracy and the Upper House of Parliament oppress the country, and cause the mismanagement of its concerns!" And then, after drawing a most exaggerated picture of alleged abuses, you declare, "Until either their privileges are restricted, or their constitution is changed, the country has little chance of good government, or a continued sound legislation!" Verily, my Lord, when I read this passage, I could hardly trust my own eyes. What! this from your Lordship;—who, if I mistake not, spoke, not long since, in the most contemptuous language of the hasty and indigested measures of the House of Commons! who panegyricized the constitution of the House of Lords, as admirably fitted to ameliorate and correct the unwise, and not unfrequently indiscreet, proceedings of the Commons! Why, really, "this is too bad!" But, your remedy, my Lord—your remedy? It is gravely proposed, it appears, by your Lordship, in order to correct whatever is amiss in the constitution of the Upper House of Parliament, that they should have——what does

the reader imagine? The schoolmaster?—No. A purification of their body?—No. An abolition of the peerage?—No such thing;—but a *free* conference with the Lower House!!! By which means an opportunity is to be given to those who are distinguished as having “more jaw than judgment,” to convince them that are wrong of their error! Further, that all the members of both Houses should attend, and that all should debate, and all vote together! Truly, your Lordship has not been to France for nothing; nor studied, it seems, without profit, in the school of that celebrated constitution-monger, the Abbé Sièyes! Mr. Cobbett has given you the name of the *Swamper*; and you appear likely enough to justify the appellation. But I am sick of such trifling.

In your “Letter,” under the signature of *Peter Jenkins*, your Lordship would seem to aim not merely at the correction of alleged aristocratic abuses, but at the subversion of the aristocracy itself; for you thank Isaac Tomkins, *gentleman*, (that is, yourself!) “for your able and just remarks upon that aristocracy which,”

you say, “ forms the chief bane of all policy, as well as all society, in this country, and which tends not much more to destroy good government over us than to sap good morals among us.” You appear, indeed, to wish not merely to get rid of the aristocracy;—but to *run a muck* at the House of Commons. “ *Our representatives,*” you exclaim, “ *have deceived us;—do not let us deceive ourselves. A considerable majority of the House of Commons is against all reform; that majority, in its heart, hates the people.*” But, you wreak your anger, in an especial way, “ on the forty or fifty pretended liberals, who have not gone over, openly, to the enemy;”—and declare, “ that they are the true cause of all the mischief that is befalling us.” Whilst, with amusing inconsistency, but from motives which cannot be misunderstood, you praise Lord Stanley and the Duke of Richmond;—who are the chiefs of the moderate party! This leads me to make a few very short remarks on your own high pretensions as a statesman and reformer.

The three subjects, on your conduct respecting which, your character, as a statesman and

reformer, will, probably, be judged by posterity, are, Law Reform,—Education,—and the Poor Laws. With respect to Law Reform, I hardly ever met with a lawyer who did not say, that you had signally failed. Whether this opinion be correct or not, I will not decide; but this I know, that the two great evils of the Court, over which you presided, are delay and expense; and that you have neither lessened the one nor abridged the other. Notwithstanding all your Lordship's boasted labours and exertions, a chancery suit is, still, as ruinously expensive and tediously enduring as ever.* As regards your Lordship's endeavours to *educationize*—without teaching religion and morals, you have yourself, if I mistake not, very lately lamented your want of success; and, certainly, it cannot be even pretended, that your attempts, in this way, have, in the slightest degree, diminished the amount of profligacy and crime. Your Lordship's experiment on the Poor Laws is now in progress; and, therefore, it will, perhaps, be but fair to wait awhile before we pronounce, definitively, either on

* *Crede experto!*

its justice or policy. But I, a *tyro* in such matters, should have thought it at least humane, if not necessary, before I rigorously dealt with the indigent here, to endeavour, by making some legal provision for the poor in Ireland, to stop the great influx of pauperism from that country into this. Your Lordship, however, is, it seems, against the principle of Poor Laws altogether;—and your opinion, it is said, is, “*that no relief ought to be afforded even to the aged and infirm poor; but that during their health and strength they ought to save enough out of their earnings to keep themselves in sickness and old age.*” If these are your Lordship’s sentiments, why, at least, not be consistent;—and, contented with your own savings in a profession munificently paid, resign the pension that you receive of £5000 a year?

In the Edinburgh Review, you severely blame even the King himself! “The evils,” you say, “of such temporary changes of Government shake men’s confidence in the monarchical system.” And again, “Can any thing be conceived better fitted to make men question the benefit of a

monarchical constitution, than to see the whole concern plunged in confusion because some political intriguer, some private friend, some hanger-on at Court, has persuaded one individual in twenty-two millions to try a rash experiment? Who can doubt, that such feats of regal activity are calculated to make men count the cost of royalty,—not in pounds, shillings, and pence, for that is its least expense—but in human happiness destroyed, and human improvement delayed?” I shall not trouble myself to expose, at any length, the gross inconsistency between the radical sentiments you now publish, and those loyal ones which, in your late excursion to the north, you took so much pains to promulgate. The expressions of devoted attachment to the King, which you then put forth, and the pains that you took to make the world believe, that you thought the political movement had gone far enough and that it ought to be arrested, were, doubtless, fitly used for the purpose which you then had in view. Your talk, at that time, was of doing less, in the way of reform, in the next session of Parliament, than had been done in the last! Ah! but you were

then in office;—and, perhaps, sometimes dreamed of the *Premiership!* You are, now, out of office; and you may, possibly, think, that it will answer your purpose to agitate, excite, and inflame. But, perhaps, I do your Lordship injustice; and reflection may, possibly, have led you, conscientiously, to prefer a republic to a monarchy. If this conjecture be well founded, I beg leave, respectfully, to ask your Lordship, whether or not you have ever considered why, although republican institutions may be most suitable for the United States of America, they are not adapted for this country? It is, I think, recorded of the late Mr. Jefferson, towards the close of his presidential career, when he had had great experience, that he said, speaking of forms of Government, “that his opinion, decidedly, was, that their (the United States) free institutions would not suit the circumstances of Europe.” Now, although individuals of the Utilitarian School, to which, I believe, your Lordship belongs, are apt, in their zeal for the establishment of a principle in matters political, to overlook, and sometimes even scoff at, the

circumstances of a case, I crave your Lordship's attention, whilst I submit to you a few facts;—on which I can suppose Mr. Jefferson's opinion to have been founded.

In the United States, owing to the abundance of fertile land, which can be had by any one for, comparatively, a trifling sum, provisions of all kinds are plentiful and cheap; a very small sum of money will enable a man to obtain the necessaries of life. Again, the population, compared with the means of subsistence, is limited and thin; and, the demand for labour being greater than the supply, wages are high. I believe, that the lowest labourer can earn a dollar a day. Hence, indigence is rarely to be met with;—indeed, never, except from gross misconduct, long illness, or sudden misfortune. The people, therefore, are contented and quiet. Now there is no danger in allowing to a people, thus happily circumstanced, great, I may say almost unlimited, political power. They have plenty to eat and drink—they are comfortably clothed and lodged—and have no temptation to meddle with, much less attack, the property of others. Every where

there is peace, and order, and submission to the laws. There is required no standing army ;—and, in fact, scarcely any interposition of the Government. Let us now look at England. Here, all the fertile land has, long since, been appropriated. And, owing to the high rental value of land, which rental value is determined by the competition for it, and owing, also, to general and local taxes and burthens, the necessaries of life cannot, without ruin to the producer of them, be sold cheap. Here, owing to the demand for labour not being equal to the supply, the wages of labour are necessarily low ;—in many instances, a mere pittance. Would it be politic, or wise, or safe, to give sovereign power to a people who find subsistence difficult and precarious ? The bulk of the people here, circumstanced as they, unfortunately, are, must be dissatisfied. They, naturally, look to change ; and, but too frequently “ imagine vain things.” *Nam semper in civitate, quibus opes nullæ sunt, bonis invident, malos extollunt ;—vetera odere, nova exoptant ; odio suarum rerum mutari omnia student.* Hence, in such a state of society, a strong police,

a standing army, and a vigilant, efficient, Conservative Government, are absolutely necessary. Need I say more to prove the soundness of Mr. Jefferson's opinion?

My Lord, it cannot be concealed, that the present times are critical. The foundations of society are shaken;—and men, instead of peaceably following their usual occupations, go about inquiring, “Who will show us any good?” Perhaps, it would not be difficult for me to explain the causes of this strange and alarming state of things. Perhaps, I could show how much the Whigs, aye, and your Lordship amongst the rest, have had to do in giving birth to those causes. But this is not the fitting occasion; nor, indeed, have I either inclination or leisure to enter on the subject. I will content myself with solemnly warning your Lordship, that these are not times for men of high rank and eminent station to scatter firebrands, and stimulate the multitude to evil. You may, perhaps, think that you could, at any time, extinguish the moral conflagration. You, perhaps, fondly believe, that although the flood-gates were opened, you could



stop the waters from rushing out; you may fancy, that you could ride the whirlwind and direct the storm. Take care that you are not deceived. Sallust, in describing Catiline, says, *Satis eloquentiæ, sapientiæ parùm; vastus animus, immoderata, incredibilia, nimis alta semper cupiebat.* This description may be applied to others as well as to Catiline. No one denies to your Lordship the praise of unceasing industry; and that you possess very considerable powers of mind. I sincerely pray, that henceforward you may use those powers creditably and beneficially for yourself, and advantageously for the country.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient servant,

JOHN RICHARDS.

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