

CATHOLIC QUESTION.

Letter of the Duke of Wellington to Dr. Curtis, R. C. Primate of Ireland.

LONDON, DECEMBER 11.

"My dear Sir—I have received your letter of the 4th inst., and I assure you, you do me justice in believing that I am sincerely anxious to witness the settlement of the Roman Catholic Question, which by benefiting the State, would confer a benefit on every individual belonging to it. But I confess that I see no prospect of such a settlement. Party has been mixed up with the consideration of the question to such a degree, and such violence pervades every discussion of it, that it is impossible to expect to prevail upon men to consider it dispassionately.

"If we could bury it in oblivion for a short time and employ that time diligently in the consideration of its difficulties on all sides (for they are very great) I should not despair of seeing a satisfactory remedy. Believe me, &c. WELLINGTON."

Dr. Curtis has published the following answer to the above:—

DROGHEDA, Dec. 19, 1828.

My Lord Duke,—I have never been more agreeably surprised in my life than by the unexpected honour of receiving your Grace's very kind and even friendly letter of the 11th inst., which, coming from so high a quarter, I should naturally wish to reserve if possible: but as it was franked by yourself, the news of its arrival was known all over this town (as might be expected from a Provincial Post-Office) before the letter reached my hands; so that I was obliged, in your Grace's defence and my own, to communicate its contents to a few chosen friends, for the satisfaction of the multitude, who might otherwise fabricate in its stead some foolish, or perhaps mischievous nonsense of their own. But, fortunately, your Grace's letter contained only such liberal and benevolent sentiments as all parties must eulogize, and none could possibly malign. Besides, it very reasonably strengthens the testimony, that I, as a faithful witness, have on all occasions given of your generous, upright, and impartial disposition.

"It would be somewhat worse than ridiculous in me, to offer any thing in the shape of political advice to a consummate statesman, at the head of the first Cabinet in or out of Europe; but as your Grace has so humbly condescended to mention some of the difficulties tending to paralyse your efforts to settle the Roman Catholic question, I beg leave to submit to your superior judgment, a few reflections, made to me by some well-informed and unbiassed friends, as well Protestants as Catholics, who certainly understand the subject much better than I can pretend to do. They have read, with great pleasure and gratitude, the noble declaration in which your Grace so strongly expresses your sincere anxiety to witness the settlement of the Roman Catholic question; which, you are convinced, would, by benefiting the state, confer a benefit on every individual of society; and you regret that you see no prospect of such a settlement, because violent party feelings are mixed with that question, and pervade every discussion of it to such a degree, as to preclude the possibility of prevailing upon men to consider it dispassionately. But that if it could be buried in oblivion for a short time, and if that time were diligently employed in the consideration of the question, you would not despair of seeing a satisfactory remedy.

"These humane and statesman-like sentiments (as far as they go) do honour to your Grace's head and heart: and might appear sufficient if you were a private nobleman, but not in your exalted station, with power to wield, when necessary, all the resources of Government; for it would be a slur on the unrivalled and far-famed British constitution to assert, that even when well administered it does not possess or supply means for establishing any thing known to be essential for the peace, welfare, and tranquility of the empire at large, or for pulling down or removing any intrigue or party spirit that might wantonly attempt to oppose so great a blessing.

"My friends allow that such momentous exertions may be sometimes successful when Government is conducted by weak or unsupported heads or hands, and that they require such a Prime Minister as the nation has now, and I hope will long have, the happiness to enjoy; who, after an uninterrupted series of the greatest victories, and a successful arrangement of the most important interests that perhaps ever yet occurred, has been placed at the head of Government by the entire and well-earned confidence of our most gracious Sovereign, and with the universal applause of the whole empire, and indeed, of all other nations. Under such a chief, exerting his legitimate prerogative, they say that no

party would dare to oppose the general good, and that if your Grace would intimate your serious resolution to settle the Roman Catholic question, its opponents would instantly fly and appear no more; and if the settlement were once carried, it would in a few days be no more spoken or thought of than the concessions now are that were lately made to the Dissenters; for the enemies of such arrangement are not half so angry in reality as they now appear to be, in order by that bugbear to carry their point. But my friends have no hesitation in declaring, that the project mentioned by your Grace, of burying the Catholic Question in oblivion, for the purpose of considering it more at leisure, is totally inadmissible, and would exasperate, in the highest degree, those who are already too much excited, and would consider that measure as a repetition of the same old pretext so often employed to elude and disappoint their hopes of redress; but that if it even were adopted, it could only serve to augment the difficulties by allowing the contending parties, and particularly the enemies of all concessions, the opportunities they seek, for preparing their means of resistance and violence, which they have latterly carried to the most alarming lengths, which they have vowed and publicly announced, in atrocious and sanguinary terms, to which, however, I should not here allude, for I never wish to be an accuser, but that I am certain your Grace must have read those horrible threats, often repeated in the Brunswick and Orange public Prints; and to this latter subject, at least, I must beg leave to call your Grace's attention, and to implore your powerful protection, humbly praying that you will not suffer public peace and concord to be violated or disturbed under any pretext whatever. An effectual remedy would cost your Grace but one word. I do not, however, hereby mean to meddle in temporal affairs: but I consider it my bounden duty to labour incessantly, in concurrence with all my venerable confederates, to impress upon the minds and hearts of all those committed to our spiritual care, sentiments of true Christian charity, moderation, and kind forbearance towards all men without exception.

"I beg your Grace will excuse the length of this letter, and vouchsafe to consider it as a proof of my unfeigned regard, and of the sincere respect with which I have the honour to remain, my Lord Duke, your Grace's most obedient and most humble servant,

"R. CURTIS."

Letter of the Marquis of Anglesea, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to the Roman Catholic Primate.

Phoenix Park, Dec. 23, 1829.

"Most Reverend Sir,—I hasten to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 2nd, covering that which you received from the Duke of Wellington on the 11th instant together with a copy of your answer to it.

"I thank you for the confidence you have reposed in me.

"Your letter gives me information upon a subject of the highest interest. I did not know the precise sentiments of the Duke of Wellington upon the present state of the Catholic question.

"Knowing it, I shall venture to offer my opinion upon the course which it behoves the Catholics to pursue.

"Perfectly convinced that the final and cordial settlement of this great question can alone give peace, harmony, and prosperity to all classes of His Majesty's subjects in this kingdom, I must acknowledge my disappointment at learning that there is no prospect of its being effected during the ensuing session of Parliament. I, however, derived some consolation from observing that his Grace is not wholly adverse to the measure; for, if he can be induced to promote it, he, of all men, will have the greatest facility in carrying it into effect.

"If I am correct in this opinion, it is obviously most important that the Duke of Wellington should be propitiated; that no obstacle that can by possibility be avoided should be thrown in his way; that all personal and offensive insinuations should be suppressed; and that ample allowance should be made for the difficulties of his situation.

"Difficult it certainly is, for he has to overcome the very strong prejudices and the interested motives of many persons of the highest influence, as well as to allay the alarms of many of the most ignorant Protestants.

"I differ from the opinion of the Duke, that an attempt should be made to bury in oblivion the question for short time; first, because the thing is utterly impossible; and next, because, if the thing were possible, I fear that advantage might be taken of the pause, by representing it as a panic achieved by the late violent reaction, and by proclaiming that if the Government at once and peremptorily decide against concession, the Catholics would cease to agitate, and then all the miseries of the last year of Ireland will be to react.

"What I do recommend is, that the measure should not be for a moment lost sight of, that anxiety should continue to be manifested, and that all constitutional (in contradistinction to merely legal) means should be resorted to to forward the cause; but that, at the same time, the most patient forbearance, the most submissive obedience to the laws should be inculcated—that no personal or offensive language should be held towards those who oppose the claims.

"Personality offers no advantage—it effects no good; on the contrary, it offends, and confirms predisposed aversion. Let the Catholic trust to the justice of his cause—to the growing liberality of mankind. Unfortunately he has lost some friends and fortified his enemies, within the last six months, by unmeasured and unnecessary violence. He will soonest recover from the present stagnation of his fortune by showing more temper, and by trusting to the legislature for redress.

"Brute force, he should be assured, can effect nothing. It is the Legislature that must decide this great question; and my greatest anxiety is, that it should be met by the Parliament under the most favourable circumstances, and that the opposers of Catholic emancipation shall be disarmed by the patient forbearance as well as by the unwearied perseverance of its advocates.

"My warm anxiety to promote the general interest of this country is the motive that has induced me to offer opinion and to offer advice.

I have the honor, &c.