A LETTER

TO THE

RIGHT HON. SIR ROBERT PEEL, BART.,

ON THE

Civil Disabilities

OF

THE JEWS.

LONDON:

JAMES GILBERT, 49, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1844.
In addressing this short Letter to you, I consider I am addressing it to the most liberal practical Statesman that England has for some centuries produced. Your enlightened and enlarged views are matters of notoriety; and it would be almost an insult to suppose that you would relinquish to any one else the pleasurable task of effacing from our Statute Book, the last "lingering remnants" of religious intolerance. Had you no other claim to the grateful recollection of posterity, this alone would suffice. Your past is a voucher for your future; and I with confidence appeal to you at the approach of this fresh Session, certain that the present union, in your person, of Reason with Power, will carry any measure you advocate triumphantly through both Houses.

This "lingering remnant," consists of a long string of vexations, expressed by one comprehensive term—"Civil Disabilities,"—on these I propose to make a few remarks, and to pass in review as rapidly as possible the arguments employed to vindicate the system.

But previously, let me ask, Sir, what Honourable opponent would not be justly irate, were the epithets—"narrow-minded," "intolerant," or "bigoted," prefixed to his name? Yet how
can such an one claim exemption, whilst supporting enact­ments whose very essence is intolerance and bigotry? Modern intelligence and modern liberality deprive him of the feeble palliation which by-gone darkness and by-gone ignorance afforded his predecessors.

I apprehend that the bare recital of the separate griev­ances, which constitute the disabilities, would be uninteresting, if not positively distasteful; I will, therefore, confine myself to a few of the more prominent arguments, or rather phrases called arguments, by which this "penal code" is supported; trusting that in neither House will be found a man so brazen as not to blush when he dares repeat the worn-out calumnies.

But supposing such a man is not found—still we are no further advanced;—for behind the phalanx of bigots, is a reserve still more formidable, and dangerously fatal,—with the former, we may contend,—they shew a front, we can attack;—but the latter is entrenched behind bomb-proof defences of apathy. To all arguments they have but one cuckoo reply,—there is no necessity — the Jews, as a party, are so insignificant that their emancipation is not called for; and such like. Now of all the propositions involving injus­tice and mischief, this is pre-eminent. For if justice cannot be obtained without agitation, (and that is what they mean) then is agitation not only necessary and justifiable, but becomes a duty. Hence agitations are laudable in the ratio of their violence, and the great Agitator's principal supporter ought to be the very Chief Justice who is now trying him. See to what results this doctrine would lead! Yet it exists, and against it all considerations, but that of expediency, are as nought.

The objections urged, however, independently of this are numerous; and if not solid, at least specious. Yet, perhaps, there were never strung together, such a tissue of non-sequi­turs—premises whose crimes against logic are darkened by their absurdity and falsehood.
It will be sufficient to hastily recapitulate these adverse objections, in order to test the progress made by "civil and religious liberty." Certain am I that where a short twenty years since they would have found scarcely a dissentient voice; now, they will have to *grop* for the obscure uncharitable suffrages of those who have ears, but—hear not; eyes—but see not. Thanks to reason, justice, and religion, the days of persecution are fast fleeing, and we shall shortly number this grievance amongst "the many that were." And to what better purpose—whether in fulfilment of a Christian duty, or as a matter of polity, could you apply the high powers which God has granted you?

Let me, Sir, premise but one more general remark, ere I enter on particulars. There exists *one* disability; not such as arises from any legal enactment, but which is so stringent in its action, that a strong and clear mind is required to shake it off during the consideration of this subject. It is this,—so accustomed are we to apply to everything that is mean—and tricky—and usurious—the term "Jewish," that our ear (in spite of ourselves) revolts at the conjunction of the terms "honour," "piety," "power," and "probity," with "Jew."—It is idle to say, that with men of education, this is not the case. It is; and to such an extent independent of the will, that I doubt not, could another term be substituted for Jew, or Hebrew, two-thirds of the present opposition to this measure of justice would insensibly be abandoned!

And now to particulars: in advocating a cause which has been so frequently under the consideration of the Legislature, it is difficult to say anything *new*: nor do I indeed know that novelties would be desirable; for Justice is simple and unadorned, and Truth wants no meretricious art to make her palatable. The less novelty in the arguments that can be urged for any measure, the stronger the inference of its simplicity and rectitude. I therefore must say, what has already oftimes been said, and by abler advocates—nor think the case any the weaker on that account.
"It would be monstrous," commence the persecutors, "that Jews should legislate for a Christian community:" this objection is plausible, but yet a palpable misrepresentation. Is the community, then, all Christian?

What is the meaning of "community"? Every school boy will tell us that "communis" cannot be all of one side; that it signifies equality. It is not proposed, as misrepresented, that Jews should legislate for Christians, but that a legislature of Christians and Jews, should legislate for a community of Christians and Jews All Religions should be fairly represented; at least, should have the power, if they choose, of protecting the integral interest of the society of which they form a fractional part: can one subject be brought forward on which the English Jew has an interest hostile to the Christian? In law? In police? In finance? In foreign policy?

True, were there a question of creating a Jew, Bishop of London, the difference between Judaism and Christianity would form a self-evident disqualification. But that the same person should not make an excellent magistrate, legislator, or financier, is absurd. Why a man should be less fit to exercise those powers, because he wears a beard, attends a different church, or abstains from particular food, I cannot conceive. Nay, throughout Europe, the sect to which he belongs confessedly furnishes the least troublesome citizens; in courts of law, less frequent; in criminal cases, more rare than those of any other denomination; and were they admitted to an equality of privileges, it may reasonably be inferred, that they would never produce an O'Driscoll for a magistrate, a Cobden for a legislator, or a Hume for a financier. No proof is needed to shew that a very good Christian may make a very bad Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Next comes the Church! the Church! Pray, what interest at all has the Jew to meddle with the Church, more than the Christian with the Synagogue. Surely its revenues, its hierarchy, its discipline, are no more to him than those
of the Rabbi are to the Christian. In its welfare, as a whole, 
he necessarily has as lively an interest, for it is an essential 
ingredient in the monarchy and constitution under which he 
enjoys security and political freedom. In any Church ques-
tion not affecting her discipline, he is just as much interested 
as in any other great national establishment: just as much 
so as a member of any dissenting sect, certainly much more 
so, than is a Catholic. Nay, the difference even between the 
Independent and the Church, is wider than that between the 
Jew and the Church, and yet, on this score, no objection is 
made to them. The principle that Churchmen ought to 
monopolize the whole power of the State would have, at least, 
an intelligible meaning. The principle that Christians ought 
to monopolize it has no meaning at all. For no questions 
connected with the ecclesiastical institution of the country 
can possibly come before Parliament, with respect to which 
there will be less difference between Christians, than be-
tween the Christian and any Jew.

I have heard it argued against, but I rather think it is 
an argument in favour of emancipation, that Jews virtually pos-
sess power, and that, therefore, to grant it them by legis-
latorial enactment, is an unnecessary and superfluous measure. 
If wealth is power, then it may be true. Money will buy 
directly, or indirectly, boroughs; and boroughs will return 
members, who, in their turn, will have their weight with a 
ministry. That such is the case, no one, Sir, can better 
testify than yourself, who must still retain a grateful recol-
lection of Westbury. But power, in the sense generally used, 
is surely something more than a concealed and occult 
agency, however irresistible. Power requires the broad day, 
the voice of the people, the acknowledged influence in 
society, the open approbation of equality and superiority. 
Hence, although some wealthy Jews may have occult influ-
ence, I deny that they have power.

Yet a very eminent writer remarks, "that as long as they 
are permitted to accumulate large fortunes they must possess 
it."
It would be almost superfluous in these mammon-worshipping times to shew that money is (to a certain extent) power, but for the fact that the Jews have money, and where wealth is there power must unavoidably be. Why not give them openly what they confessedly enjoy privately? Is any man so insane as to suppose that a war of any length could take place without the concurrence of that talismanic name, more puissant in Europe, than the signature of the Autocrat of all the Russias, for it governs the money market, and the money market governs the world—and yet the name is that of a Jew. Is there any minister in England, bold enough to allow a Jew, however puissant, to inscribe "Right Honourable" before his name?—so great would be the popular storm he would bring about his ears. No; although a Chancellor of the Exchequer, might notoriously have been closeted with, and referred his financial scheme for support to this Jew,—although by this Jew's operations in the funds, he might prop up or crush a Ministry! Austria has shewn more moral courage in this;—France, and America, courage and justice too. Away, then, with the humbug of a philosophy, which holds one hand for gold, and with the other smites the lender of it on the cheek; which professes universal charity, and yet is guilty of the foulest of persecutions, the most galling of tyrannies, the political, and, consequently, "the social ban."

Their admission to some minor privileges has of late years been conceded. We have seen Aldermen, Sheriffs, and (under the Whigs) a Baronet, and a Knight or two. Have any of these shewn incompetency to fulfil their duties, or to gallantly maintain their dignities? Did not the intense pleasure with which these nominations were received shew the acute sensibility of their co-religionists at their long-borne and irritating exclusion? If these nominations were "a feeler," nothing could be more satisfactory than the result: we will never believe that there is "finality" in these few civil exceptions. No. But is civil and political synonymous? If so, the supporters of admitting Jews to civil privileges, and
preventing their enjoyment of political power, are arguing for "a distinction without a difference." For my part, I hold privileges to be power. For instance, no one would challenge a respectable Jew, supposing he were in the jury box. But what scandal, if he were in the seat of justice, clothed in scarlet and ermine! Yet is it the jurymen who virtually tries the case! It would be impious to let a Jew sit in Parliament. But he may make money, and money may make members. That, therefore, a Jew should possess the substance of legislative power, is as it should be; but that he should enter the mysterious sanctuary, and "take his seat," would be a profanation sufficient to bring ruin on the country. Mark, that I do not say there are not instances of usury and rapacity. But only admit that money is power, and then say are they more greedy after it than Christians are after power; or being synonymous, does not the pursuit become equally laudable? Such are some of the many contradictions resulting from a ridiculous prejudice; a prejudice sucked in with our milk, fostered at school, logically approved at college, sanctioned by law, custom, and habit. To overturn the deep-rooted absurdity requires a giant mind, giant power, and giant will; such, Sir, the world ascribe to you. The honest care that a Prime Minister has for his place in history, forbids your delaying to use it.

A parallel has been drawn by some writer between the Catholics and the Jews. It has been said that the same objection to give them political power was formerly urged,—the same cry of "Give all, except political power," when in point of fact "all" included the exception.

We cannot quite agree to this parallel; no dark antecedents of persecution and slavery hung over the Catholic Church; she had ruled the world for ages, her religion had never been anathematized by Christian Europe. The Protestant was but her rebellious child—but still her child—flesh of her flesh, and bone of her bone; Triumphant she had laid her hand on her schismatic daughter: Defeated, she experienced the same fate; it became a struggle between equals, which
has ended in an honourable peace. Can we compare this to the ages of persecution and indignities undergone by the Jewish Church? can we compare their silent and modest claims for relief to the bold bearing and haughty defiance of Ireland and her champions? Oh! shame on that legislature which demands violence, ere it will dole out redress. Agitation, dreadful bantling, as yet but a troublesome child, brought up at the flogging-block of the Attorney General; who can predict the career of thy manhood! If thou provest a destroyer of those who forced thee into existence, then wilt thou only be the agent of a just retribution: as for the Jews, they will continue to suffer, rather than gain their end by such unholy assistance. *

Another rallying cry, one which brings under the same banner of intolerance men of all parties, is, "The Constitution;" "What," cry they, "what have Jews to do with a Christian constitution?"

The constitution, it is said, is essentially Christian. It might with equal reason be said that cookery was essentially Anabaptist, or fox-hunting essentially Methodist.

It is because sufficient reflection is not given to what the terms "Constitution" and "Government" mean, that so shallow a question is raised. The limits of this Letter forbid their discussion; but if Government exists, as I apprehend it does, for the purpose of keeping the peace, settling disputes by arbitration instead of blows, of compelling us to supply our wants by industry instead of rapine, then it will be necessary to show that the Jews are a class of people who do not deem themselves interested in the security of property, the maintenance of order, and the punishment of crime; then, and not till then, ought they to be excluded from power, which exist for man's security and order. Is it not a source of deep mortification to a class of men that they are excluded

* Let them not, however, suppose that no exertion can be crowned with success. Why do they not form an association, and choose a clever secretary to communicate with members of both Houses, &c.?
from political power? If it be, they have, on Christian principles, a right to be freed from that mortification, unless it can be shown that their exclusion is necessary for the averting of some greater evil. The presumption is evidently in favour of toleration. It is for the persecutor to make out his case!

That to the great mass, on one side, it is a bitter sense of humiliation without corresponding triumph on the other, of mortification without benefit, is self-evident. How, as Christians or Politicians, can we continue to uphold a system of wrong, which is neither palliated by experience or necessity, nor sanctioned by policy or Divine precept?

Again, it is said that "they are a separate people, living locally in this Island, but morally and politically in communion with their brethren all over the world:" this is so diametrically opposed to truth, that it is not worth the pains that have been taken to refute it. Doubtless, there is the sympathy of caste, and the sympathy from persecution. But who more eagerly accept the few civil offices to which they are admitted? Who make better country gentlemen (and the instances are tolerably numerous)? Who, in short, are better citizens, and better Englishmen than they? The fault, Sir, is not in the want of affection on their part towards England, but in her cold demeanour and cruel conduct towards them. This is admitting that the charge of want of patriotism is true, which, however, I utterly deny. "Foreign attachment arises from domestic mis-rule." When have the English Jews shown any "foreign attachment?" when has England shown otherwise than "domestic mis-rule?" There is no feeling which more certainly develops itself in the minds of men, living under tolerable good government, than the feeling of patriotism. To make, therefore, this assumed want of patriotism a ground of accusation against them, is a false and vulgar sophistry; the logic of the wolf against the lamb!

If the English Jews really felt a deadly hatred to England; if, in their synagogues, they invoked Ezekiel-like curses
on London, 'the destruction of Tyre and the plagues of Egypt,' even then their fierce hatred would not surpass that of one Christian sect against another. But, in fact, the feeling of the Jews is not such. It is precisely what their situation engenders; better treated than the French Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries, or our own Puritans in the time of Laud, and, consequently, better affected to the State than the followers of Coligni or Vane, but far less well treated than Dissenters; on this account, and this alone, they possess a more exclusive spirit. Rulers must not be suffered thus by these wholesale sweeping assertions to absolve themselves of their solemn responsibility. It is not for them to say a sect is not patriotic. It is their business to make them patriotic—History and reason clearly indicate the means.'

Ere you say they cannot be made Englishmen, try, Sir, the experiment further. But do not treat them as aliens, and then reproach them with not entertaining the feelings of natives. It is but another form of the tyranny which punished their fathers for not making bricks without straw.

As to the absurd allegation of their looking on England as a "place of bondage," a "place of sojourn," a "half-way house to the promised land of Zion," it is idle to refute it. To charge men with what they themselves deny is disingenuous in controversy, atrocious in government.

We are told, finally, that the measure would only have the effect of introducing to the legislature some six or eight wealthier members. On such grounds as this I cannot argue. I object to the begging in forma pauperis, and from the harmlessness of insignificance, that meed of justice, which is now an indisputable right.

I have never heard that a Jew is less eager in any honourable competition, which the laws allow him; or less active, or less business-like, than his neighbours. Does he, in his mode of life, his habits, his arrangements, take into account the chance of migrating to Palestine? If not, why are we to suppose that feelings which never influence him as a merchant, will
pervade his whole action as soon as he becomes a Magistrate or a Legislator?

Prophecy has also been called in. "It is foretold they are to be wanderers." Is it right to give them a home? "It is foretold they are to be oppressed." Can we with propriety suffer them to be rulers? To admit them to the rights of citizens is manifestly to insult the Divine oracles. If we admit them to Parliament, the prophecy cannot mean we should exclude them from Parliament. This objection is so much in the Praise-God-Barebones style, it is impossible to mention it without a smile. It is happily quite out of the power of our frail species to falsify prophecy.

Let these Scripture-expounding Gentry see what the practice of confounding prophecy with precept entails. Actions say they are good and just, merely because they have been predicted. Then what more laudable actions than the Crucifixion, the kiss of Judas, and the judgment of Pilate? I presume they will be conveniently oblivious of the text, "Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed."

Applauding Europe saw the liberal Commons of England carry this wholesome measure through their House, in spite of the opposition of power. What must have been her opinion? What was her opinion of the intolerance of the upper House? America and France have out-stripped us in liberality, and in the march of enlightened freedom.

And now, in conclusion, but not as an argument, let me add, that, as a whole, a more industrious, charitable, peaceable, and loyal class do not exist than the great body of English Jews; whilst, as regards the few whom this proposed relief would admit to Parliament, I can confidently appeal to very many Members of both Houses, whether a more highly educated, gentlemanly, and strictly honourable set of men can be found in any of the ‘salons’ of European Society. If they can name any exceptions, by their rarity they would only prove the truth of my assertion.

To the conscientious opponent on religious grounds, I will
add any sincere belief that the "removal" would make more converts in a few years than whole centuries of persecution.

I know of no period better fitted than the present for terminating long hostilities and repairing cruel wrongs; it is quite in the spirit of the age;—happily in you, Sir, reason being united with power, I am only expressing the sentiments of the whole order of enlightened gentlemen, when I call upon you to take advantage of this happy juncture to blot out from our statute book these last traces of religious intolerance.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

COSMOPOLITE.