

**A LETTER TO THE RIGHT HON. LORD
BROUGHAM, AND TO THE EDUCATED
AND INTELLECTUAL CLASSES, ON THE
EXCELLENCIES AND CONSOLATIONS
OF "DIVINE PHILOSOPHY"**

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A letter to the right hon. lord Brougham, and to the educated and intellectual classes, on the excellencies and consolations of "Divine Philosophy" by James Nisbet

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JAMES NISBET

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TO THE
RIGHT HON. LORD BROUGHAM,
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Educated and Intellectual Classes.
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"DIVINE PHILOSOPHY."

Ταύτην μόνην εὑρισκον φιλοσοφίαν ασφαλῆ τε καὶ σέμφορον
ἕως δὴ καὶ διὰ ταῦτα φιλόσοφος εἶμι.
JUSTIN. DIALOG. p. 152.

"How charming is divine philosophy."
MILTON.

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MDCCLX.

42.

A LETTER, &c.

MY LORD,

WHOEVER highly esteems intellectual powers and acquirements, as among God's noblest gifts—unless his own mind be possessed by envy and selfishness, or his temperament peculiarly cold and abstracted—must feel at times a deep interest in the character, career, and welfare of those whom the Giver of all good has most eminently thus endowed, even although not admitted to their intercourse, nor personally knowing them.

Such a feeling has been strongly awakened in myself, with respect to several distinguished writers and speakers now passed into another world; most of all, I think, in the instance of that eloquent De Stael, to whom your Lordship has fitly assigned a place among the

“statesmen” of our age. No doubt, in this case, the warmth and brilliancy of her imaginative powers, and the spell of her deep and pensive sentiment, much augmented the impression. It exists, however, under a different modification, towards those great minds whose temperament, and sphere, and achievements are of a severer cast.

I am persuaded, my Lord, that from this kind of feeling, as well as from more simply considering the actual and important influence which you have exerted and might still exert, the announcement of your impaired health has affected not a few of your countrymen with genuine concern. It is said that your Lordship has suffered acutely from the loss of your nearest relatives; and that from these causes your indisposition has at least been aggravated, cannot but be deemed highly probable.

Minds of a lively and melting sensibility are, I believe, often less profoundly and lastingly wounded by great distresses, than they who endure with calmness and resist with active strength. The weeping willow droops,

and the gnarled oak is riven. I have fallen unawares into metre; which, where figures are employed, is often near at hand. These facts, however, even if as true as I suppose them, will not go far towards vindicating from the charge of officious impertinence one who ventures to urge on your Lordship topics of consolation and resources of happiness.

That charge may be perhaps somewhat extenuated, by mentioning, that he who addresses you, however inferior both in social and mental rank, is one that has himself suffered; partly from great and repeated bereavements of the same and other kinds, partly from a mind so framed as to have often realized what Byron has expressed, (though memory may not furnish his exact words,)

" This melancholy is a fearful gift,
Holding up life in utter nakedness,
Making the cold reality too real."

I address your Lordship, however, not privately, but through the press—and thus not so much personally, as in the quality of one who may fitly represent, by eminence, the educated

and intellectual classes generally;—I do so because this method obviates in part the imputation above referred to, of assuming to teach or to console *such* a reader.

I would fain hope and believe, my Lord, that you have of late, (if not earlier,) yourself revolved and felt the truths which may here be suggested. If so,—or if you should decline, which perhaps is in your case almost unavoidable, to be led by another, and a stranger, towards them,—the suggestions here made will still be placed thus before other minds; some of whom may account them less unworthy of notice, just *because* the writer *has* presumed to address or inscribe them to a censor so distinguished. Thus the charge of arrogance is in part averted, while the scope and sphere of whatever good may, by God's blessing, be hoped for, is indefinitely widened.

If, indeed, any near approach in point of intellectual grasp or furniture were requisite to justify and encourage such an attempt, your Lordship would feel that few, if any, even of the great leaders with whom you have been in

collision or co-operation through life, ought to venture on the task.

But few can know better than yourself how true and variously applicable is the maxim so tersely given by La Fontaine—

“ On a souvent besoin d'un plus petit que soi ;”

for the greater men are, the more occasions must they have to experience this; and, if not “ often,” it may at least be sometimes true as to the best and most availing presentment of those truths which most deeply concern our happiness.

The consolations, or sources of hope, which (as one who has in a *measure* proved them) I would now suggest, are, indeed, any thing but new; on the contrary, their impression is likely to be abated by their being deemed so trite and common. For it is certain, that they are sufficiently understood and appreciated to be effectually embraced, by very many feeble and vulgar minds; often also presented *by* such, and sometimes, perhaps, purposely *for* such, in the garb of cant or technicality, and in connexion or mixture with

extreme and untenable opinions, which render them repulsive to cultivated tastes and to comprehensive and powerful understandings; though such a dress, I believe, may most adapt them to the popular tone of thought and of susceptibility. But I conceive that, when divested of these adjuncts, which are, in great part, mere media of conveyance, the doctrines and discoveries *peculiar* to Christianity will be found, in spite of the strong aversion and contempt of many gifted persons, to contain in them the highest and best *philosophy*—that of true consolation, high moral advancement, and abiding satisfaction. You have yourself argued, my Lord, with eminent success, and with a weight which the *future* influence of your name will, I am persuaded, continue to augment, the existence and attributes of Deity. A most important task; not merely on account of the dependence which you have shown of revelation on Natural Theology, but also as combating that actual or virtual atheism, whether of materialists, like Broussais, or spiritualists, like