

**A LETTER TO JOSHUA WATSON.  
GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF A  
SINGULAR LITERARY FRAUD  
PRACTISED ON THE MEMORY OF  
BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR**

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A Letter to Joshua Watson. Giving an Account of a Singular Literary Fraud Practised on the Memory of Bishop Jeremy Taylor by Edward Churton

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**EDWARD CHURTON**

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*f. a. w. 1200*  
*1848*

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# LETTER

TO

JOSHUA WATSON, ESQ. D.C.L.

GIVING AN ACCOUNT OF

A SINGULAR LITERARY FRAUD PRACTISED ON THE

MEMORY OF BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR.

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BY

EDWARD CHURTON, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF CLEVELAND.

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Cloth of frieze, be not too bold,  
Tho' thou be match'd with cloth of gold.

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LONDON:

FRANCIS & JOHN RIVINGTON,  
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE.

1848.

A  
L E T T E R,

&c.

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MY DEAR FRIEND,

THERE are few living members of the Church of England, to whom an attempt to vindicate the memory of Bishop Taylor can be more appropriately addressed, than to one, who, if he had been his contemporary, might have been ranked with the Evelyns or Sir George Dalstons, who shared that great prelate's friendship and counsels: few, to whom the age is more indebted for a pious care of the devotional treatises of Bishop Taylor, and for restoring those aids to prayer and rules of life, to the place they must ever claim, while Christianity remains among us, as the choice companions of a Church of England man in his retired hours. It is also not unknown, that your attention has been turned, both before and since the appearance of Bishop Heber's Life of Taylor, and his collected edition of his works, to some critical enquiries into the correctness of the opinion,

which Heber found and followed, attributing certain Treatises, unowned by the great prelate in his lifetime, to his pen. When, in former years, I communicated to you some of my doubts on these Treatises, it was with no slight interest that I learned how the same doubts had, in more than one instance, occurred to yourself; and that your patient researches had been prosecuted so far as to enable you, with little hesitation, to name the true authors of two of them.

The first of the two, the 'Christian Consolations,' which had, as long ago as the year 1825, awakened the theological acumen of the memorable Alexander Knox, to reject it from the genuine productions of Taylor, has since been ascertained, by the diligence of a divine well-read in the theology of the seventeenth century, the Rev. James Brogden, to be the undoubted work of the worthy Bishop Hacket, the restorer of the cathedral of Lichfield<sup>1</sup>. The 'Psalter,' which was with more probable evidence admitted into Heber's collection, you have with good reason re-assigned to a well-known friend of Taylor,—Christopher, Lord Hatton<sup>2</sup>. In the ascription of these

<sup>1</sup> That Bishop Hacket was the author, was stated before in Knox's Correspondence, and a London edition of the work has since appeared with Hacket's name: but Mr. Brogden has discovered passages in the 'Consolations' which are identical with Hacket's acknowledged Sermons.

<sup>2</sup> It is now published as Hatton's Psalter, by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.—See a notice in Roger North's Life of Dr. John North, p. 251.

Treatises to the author of the 'Holy Living and Dying,' however, no great wrong was either done or intended to his memory. If they were not rightly assigned in their titles, and the 'Consolations,' in particular, showed signs of a school of doctrine somewhat different from Taylor's, they were both treatises of great value, tempered with words and thoughts that breathe the warm spirit of devotion, and written in a style of touching eloquence, which the admirers of Taylor could appreciate.

Of a somewhat different character is the work, which I propose to discuss in the following pages. More than ten years since, I first ventured to invite a little public enquiry into the origin of the 'Contemplations on the State of Man,' so long circulated among religious readers under the name of Taylor, and asserted for his in an advertisement prefixed to every edition through which it appears to have passed. Our late lamented friend, the excellent Hugh J. Rose, took some interest in the question; and, with his consent, a letter was published in the 'British Magazine' for August, 1837, without, however, much success in procuring further light from other quarters. Being at that time unable to do more than examine the external evidence for ascribing it to Bishop Taylor, and to point out some passages, which seemed contrary to the doctrine of his acknowledged writings, and unworthy of his genius and learning, I could only express an opinion that this Treatise would be found to be from the pen of



some pious member of the Church of Rome, and probably of Spanish or Italian original. At the same time, it so happened, that, in tracing some resemblances which it furnished to the theology of the South of Europe, I inadvertently quoted the real author; but, as I had then no access to the body of his writings, and had no more direct clue to the discovery, the case was left in incompleteness and uncertainty.

Later enquiries have been more fortunate; and, on communicating the result of them to you, it seemed to be your opinion, that this literary fraud on Bishop Taylor's memory is sufficiently singular and remarkable to deserve a more formal exposure. I am, therefore, encouraged to tell the story at length, and submit it to the public eye.

It appears that the Treatise with the title of 'Contemplations on the State of Man' was first published in 1684, about seventeen years after the death of Taylor<sup>3</sup>. The date of its appearance alone was sufficient to excite some suspicion; and it might have been expected that the Church, which then numbered among its critical wits such men as Stillingfleet, Bull, Hickes, and Charles Leslie, would have found some one to examine the claim, which was so boldly put forth to the patronage of a name so eminent. The excellent John Evelyn was also living; and he, whose friendship had been manifested in so

<sup>3</sup> Bp. Heber's *Life of Taylor*, p. cxxiv.

many ways while the great prelate lived, could not have been indifferent to any thing that concerned his posthumous good fame. It is not, however, known to me, that any question was raised at the time of this publication.

The fraud was probably a gainful one to the inventors. The work became highly popular; it was commended by some respectable divines, especially Dr. Woodward of the Religious Societies; and ten editions were printed and sold off in the course of the next half century.

Bishop Heber, therefore, in his *Life of Taylor*, had a long-established public consent to support him, when he speaks of the 'Contemplations' as "a work marked as Taylor's on unquestionable authority." He adds, indeed, that "it has the appearance of an unfinished production, and is by no means equal to the general style of his compositions<sup>1</sup>." Subsequently, after repeating his unhesitating acceptance of its genuineness, he criticises the *Treatise*, as he does the other works of Taylor, more in detail. It is, he says, a treatise, which in its present state its author would hardly have sent out to the world:

"It is marked indeed, throughout, with genuine and characteristic piety. It displays, even more ostentatiously than Taylor was accustomed to do, a strange and almost unbounded familiarity with all kinds of reading, from the Fathers and the Schoolmen down to the Voyages of the Buccaneers. Its author is evidently one before whom the page of ancient and modern History lay

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<sup>1</sup> *Life*, p. cxxiv.

open; and whose mind was imbued with a recollection of the greatest poets and orators of antiquity. Nor are there wanting descriptions conceived in the powerful tone and animated feeling of a poet or an orator. But never were such powers and acquirements employed to garnish such a string of truisms,—to tell us that time is always on the wing,—that all human things are transitory, because Thebes and Quinsay had both fallen into ruins,—that the fame of the greatest of Europeans cannot hope to pass the barrier of the Riphean mountains, any more than the glory of 'Veneatpadino Ragium, king of Narsinga,' hath sounded through the cities of the West." . . .

"On the whole," he concludes, "there are, perhaps, more and greater faults of style in the 'Contemplations on the State of Man,' than in any of Taylor's other writings; but there are also beauties of description and of illustration, which, out of his writings, I know not where to find, and which, if he had written this work alone, would have raised him to no vulgar height among the divines of the seventeenth century<sup>5</sup>."

A more sceptical critic than Bishop Heber would have examined the grounds for asserting, that this Treatise was "marked as Taylor's on unquestionable authority." The authority is to be found in two short addresses to the reader, prefixed to all the old editions which have come under my notice, and reprinted by Bishop Heber. The first of these addresses, it is observable, says nothing of the authorship, but merely commends the work to the courteous reader. It is subscribed with the name of "B. Hale, D. D.," a name unknown among Taylor's friends, and not easily traced among the English divines who might be living in 1684. There was a Dr. Bernard Hale, Archdeacon of

<sup>5</sup> Life of Taylor, p. clii—clv.