

# Historians Criticised

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The following letters were copied in 1921 from the originals then in the possession of Edward B. Ffennell, M.D., of Southbourne-on-Sea, Hants.

## DAVID HUME TO ELIZABETH SHACKLETON

DAVID HUME (1711-1776), philosopher and historian. The first portion of his *History of England during Reigns of James I and Charles I*, appeared in 1754. He worked backward in subsequent volumes and also forward to the Revolution in 1688.

ELIZABETH SHACKLETON (1726-1804) was the second wife of Richard Shackleton, of Ballitore, Ireland.

Madam

I am very much oblig'd to you for the honour you have done me, in taking notice of any of my writings : and I own, that I have a great desire of justifying to you my Intentions at least, in those passages, which you seem to think exceptionable. When I said, that the Quakers may in some respects be regarded as Deists, I thought that I was doing them the greatest honour, by putting them on the same footing with Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Seneca and the wisest Men in all Ages.

As that sect has shaken off the Dominion of Priests, who are the great Corrupters of religion, and neglect all positive Institutions, they are led almost necessarily to confine themselves to natural Theology, at least where they are not irritated by Persecution : Morality and a Reverence for the supreme Being become the Basis of their Principles and scarcely admit of any superstructure.

As to my historical Account of the Origin of the Quakers, I drew it chiefly from Sewel, who was of the Sect. I have indeed a great Regard for that Body of Men, especially for the present Members : and I acknowledge that, even in the last Century, when all the different Sects were worrying one another, and throwing the State into Convulsions, they were always peaceable, charitable, and exemplary, and have in every Shape deservd well of the Public.

After returning you again my acknowledgements for the obliging Terms employd in your letter, I remain

Madam,

Your most obedient and most humble servant  
Edinburgh.

DAVID HUME.

5 of July 1770.

[Addressed] To Mrs. Shackelton at  
Richard Shackeltons  
Ballitore.

### “ THOMAS LELAND ” TO RICHARD SHACKLETON

THOMAS LELAND (1722-1785) published in 1773 his *History of Ireland from the Invasion of Henry II, with a preliminary Discourse on the ancient State of that Kingdom*.

RICHARD SHACKLETON (1726-1792) was the founder of the celebrated Quaker school at Ballitore, Co. Kildare, Ireland. The passage, to which exception was taken appears in volume three at page 504: “ But those called Protestant were chosen from Quakers or other Enthusiasts, from the poor, the profligate and contemptible.”

This letter was proved to be a spurious production.

Dear Sir

Your Character in the literary world being well known & your Judgment much admired, I must beg your opinion of my History of Ireland. Candidly point out what passages you may think are too obscurely or rather poorly expressed: in short, your thoughts upon the whole will be pleasing: perhaps you'll think the request rather out of the way, but it is from one who shall esteem an acquaintance with you as the highest Honour, even a correspondence

I remain, Dear Sir, with great esteem  
& true respect,

Your very humble servant

THOMAS LELAND

T. College, 24th June 1773.

[Addressed] Mr. Shackleton,  
Ballitore.

### THOMAS LELAND TO RICHARD SHACKLETON

Sir

July 2. 1773

My absence from Dublin prevented me from receiving your favour till this day. Who ever he was that took the liberty of addressing a Letter to you in my name, & whatever

were his intentions, I account myself obliged to him. He has indeed been guilty of an unprovoked incivility to us both: but he has been the means of introducing me (in some sort) to one, of whom our common friends have often spoken with the utmost affection & respect, & with whom I exceedingly wished to be acquainted.

I know not in what terms the request was made, that you would give your Opinion of my Book: but I beg you will allow me to repeat it, with sincere esteem, and a very just sense of the value of your opinion. I shall return to Dublin in the course of next week, & my first care shall be to send a set of the History of Ireland to Mr Jackson's. If you do me the honour to peruse it, I must entreat you will not send it back, but accept of it as a small mark of my sincere regard

The Book has been read in England, & received with more favour than I hoped for. Here it has a few attentive readers. But as to the Publick in general, I was ever persuaded that in this Kingdom at least their voice would be determined precisely in the manner you mention. I am sorry to say that you will find it very incorrectly printed.

Believe me, with very sincere Respect & Regard

Sir

Your faithful and most Obedient Servant,

THO LELAND

#### RICHARD SHACKLETON TO THOMAS LELAND

Doctor Leland

I had the favour of writing to thee some time ago, & handed thee the Original Mock-Letter which gave rise to our correspondence. I have not had the pleasure of hearing from thee since, but perused thy history with the best attention which I was capable of. I am much obliged to thee for the book, & for the entertainment & instruction which it has afforded me. Good History casts such a light on all sides & upon such a multitude of objects, & is so nearly concerned with Religion & Morality that he certainly deserves very well of the Publick who contributes in so great a degree to their pleasure & profit by presenting them with a work of this kind.

Thy History, without doubt, has cost thee much painful labour: there must have been much pioneering, much fable & falsehood to clear away, & when this has been done, but scanty & base materials left to erect a comely edifice. However, the Cement is so good, & the several parts so aptly joined together, that we see a complete, well-finished (though not a magnificent) Structure, a Structure, which, in my opinion, will last, although a flood of calumny & false Criticism should assault it.

I only speak my own unbiass'd sentiments, I have neither opportunity, nor leisure to ransack & examine the Stores from which the great leading historical Events have been drawn, but I have all along particularly remarked such a diligent, wary Investigation of the reality of facts & characters, that I attend to the Narrative with the satisfaction which a man feels, who is persuaded from the cautious Veracity of his author that what he hears is true.

An History of our own Country is in some respects like an history of our own times: it necessarily, by some means or other, touches so nearly particular families, that it is no wonder if Individuals are piqued in some cases where family-pride or interest is concerned, & taking offence at a part decry the whole work. Self-love sits close to us, & we do not like to see an Aspersion lie even on our family-names. Different sentiments also in religious matters cannot fail of operating variously in those who read such a History: these Sentiments being interwoven among our earliest prejudices, & fast rooted and riveted by our Judgments, or our feelings, are not indeed easily shaken, but very sensible of any rude attack. On this account I am also of the number who think some part of thy history exceptionable.

I know very well that the people called Quakers have their frame & organs, & are subject to like passions with other men, & that through the deceivableness of Unrighteousness & delusions of a subtile Enemy (who is transformed into an Angel of light) they may be mistaken & led astray in their religious exercises, unless according to the Apostle's advice, they watch & be sober: Unless they patiently wait & watch for the appearance of Christ (by his Spirit) in their hearts, who told his then present followers, "Without me ye can do nothing," & who encouraged his future followers

to expect the same aid by the Promise of, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world:” Unless they thus wait they may run before they are sent, & offer the sacrifice of Fools: and unless they be sober, and steady, keeping to the feeling sense of Divine Truths & under the Guidance of Divine Wisdom, they may, as well as others, follow the Imaginations of their own brain instead of Immediate Revelation, be deceived themselves, & deceive others.

These dangers, my Friend, I frankly confess attend us: but as I also hope & believe we are in general happily preserved from them, I do not think that we deserve to be caricatured in the lump with the denomination of Enthusiasts. However this does not cause but that I hold both the Author & his History in great respect & estimation, & when David Hume calls us Deists & Doctor Leland Enthusiasts, I can still think those men the ornaments of their age & country, as I admire the celebrated Writers of the Augustan Age, who yet looked on the primitive Christians in *their* time as a contemptible, insignificant sect, and thereby proved the Truth of the Apostle’s observation, that the world by wisdom knew not God.

I hope thou wilt excuse the liberty which I take in thus expressing myself: I assure thee it is not without sentiments of real regard & esteem. I am persuaded that Doctor Leland has pondered deeply on the most interesting subjects, & knows that a Religion which does not enter into a man’s feelings & influence his life can be of no service to him: it is unanimated, dry & formal. Yet as a man’s Feelings can only be rightly known by himself, can often with difficulty be explained to others, and often cannot at all be comprehended by them, it may be necessary that a people dissenting from a National Religion & Way of Worship established by law should give some reason for their dissent, & a Rational Account of their Faith. I therefore hand thee herewith a Treatise on our Religious Principles, which I beg leave to recommend to thy solid perusal; & whether thou wilt approve of it or not, I request that thou wilt accept of it from me, as a Token of my sincere Regard, who am

respectfully thine

RICHARD SHACKLETON

Ballitore: 17 October 1773.

## THOMAS LELAND TO RICHARD SHACKLETON

Dear Sir

It is not without sincere regret that I have been so long diverted from my purpose of acknowledging the favour of your last letter, & the obliging present that attended it. A variety of cares & occupations on my appointment to an extensive parish in Dublin & some intervals of languor and depression occasioned by the remains of those Nervous affections which I contracted by making more use of my pen than my horse, are the only excuses I can make for so long a silence. Let me at length entreat you to accept my cordial thanks for a Letter so flattering to me; & which confirms me in the respectful sentiments I had entertained of the writer.

I am particularly gratified by the candour & kindness of your remarks on the difficulties I encountered both in collecting & selecting the materials of my History, and the appearance of veracity that it bears. My task was indeed laborious, & whatever violence I might do to prejudices & prepossessions, I considered myself as an Evidence before the Tribunal of the public, & as solemnly bound to declare the truth, to the best of my Knowledge, as we should have been, had I *sworn* & you *affirmed*. The consequence has been in this Kingdom, as I supposed; my Representations have not given entire satisfaction to any party. I have been already attacked from different quarters, but with so much impotence, so much frivolous & captious folly, & so shameful an ignorance of the subject, as are perfectly mortifying. For I confess I should have liked to have been called out by an ingenious and plausible Critic. Forgive a little ebullition of vanity, when I declare I felt somewhat of the ardor of a much younger and cleverer fellow.

Optat aprum aut fulvum descendere monte leonem

And now, none but the most ignoble beasts of the field have deigned to take any notice of me. But I am abundantly consoled by a number of such testimonies as your's. And in a country where Irish Parties are little regarded, I have received a great deal more than Justice.

But I cannot sufficiently thank you for the truly polite, ingenuous & candid manner in which you have urged your objection to one particular expression that escaped me.

If it be Quakerism to enforce the momentous distinction between the vital influencing spirit of Christianity and the nominal & formal profession of Religion, I have ever been preaching Quakerism, & God grant I may live & die a Quaker!

But instead of entering into certain discussions, in which I might not express a difference of sentiment with the same politeness, or to give it a more honourable name, with the same spirit of meekness, that you have done, I at once plead guilty, & acknowledge that no Religious Sect should ever be generally included in any one invidious appellation. Had I received your favour before the Octavo Edition was printed off, the Expression should not have continued in it. I must take the first opportunity in my power of correcting it.

Farewel, my Dear Sir, & believe me very gratefully & respectfully

Your obliged & affectionate Servant,

THO LELAND

Nov<sup>r</sup> 23. 1773

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## The Value of a Cook Stove

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“ While the Collins party were spending the few days in Denver on the way to the mines, they became acquainted with a man by the name of Brown. This man owned a forty-acre plot of ground taking in the new camp and extending beyond, and had built a cabin on the bank of Cherry Creek. Mahlon and his wife had brought a cook stove all the way from Iowa. Such stoves were evidently scarce in the camp for Brown offered to trade the forty acres for the cook stove.

“ Mahlon gave the man a withering look, and said, ‘ Do you see any green in my eye ? ’ Then he continued, ‘ I guess not. ’ ‘ Trade you a perfectly good cook stove for your forty worthless acres of sand hills. ’ He left Brown with indignation.

“ Forty years after this incident, Mahlon Collins spent some days in the city of Denver. Looking about, he finally came to the conclusion that the forty acres which had been offered him for a cook stove lay in the heart of the city and that the cabin site had been approximately where the Lorimer Street viaduct now spans the bed of Cherry Creek.”

From the life of Mahlon Day Collins, a Friend, printed in the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, Jan., 1930. Iowa City, Iowa.