

41 To THEOPHILUS LINDSEY, 3 April 1789

MS: Dr. Williams's Library, MS. 12.12, f. 82-83

PRINTED: Rutt, I, ii, pp. 20-21

ADDRESS: The Rev^d Mr Lindsey Essex Street London

POSTMARK: Birmingham, [Apr] 04 1789

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Dear friend

Your account of Mr Belsham¹ surprises and pleases me much. I am glad that his embarrassment is of so short continuance, and think he will make an useful addition to the Corps at Hackney.² But if he teach Divinity, for which he is best qualified, what will they do with D^r Rees,³ of whom they have hitherto, (but ~~any~~ without any reason in my opinion) made so much account! It will be an Unitarian Academy, do what they will.

I am sorry to hear what you say of the flagging of discipline, as it is not easy to restore it; but I can easily conceive that D^r Price⁴ may be alarmed without much reason.

I am happy in the near prospect of my usual interview with you. I shall call, as usual, upon you, if all be well, on tuesday next at noon in my way to M^f Vaughan's,⁵ and the next day shall hope to dine with you, according to custom, at M^{rs} Rayner's.⁶ The two first sundays will, of course, be yours, if you chuse it, but I shall have three, and the arrangem^t of them will be as you please, leaving one for D^r Price.

I have been informed from several quarters of the mean jealousy of D^r Barnes⁷ respecting the new Unitarian Chapel. He is an enemy to all free inquiry. I hear the Academy that he is a[t] the head of does not flourish at all.⁸

¹ Thomas Belsham (1750-1829), Unitarian minister. Belsham was assistant tutor at the Daventry academy (1770-1778) and tutor in Divinity (1778-1789). By 1789 he had abandoned Arianism for the Unitarian position on the humanity of Christ. His consequent resignation from Daventry and from his pulpit in June of that year caused a sensation in the dissenting world [R. K. Webb, 'Belsham, Thomas (1750-1829)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn.].

² Following his resignation from Daventry, Belsham had been offered the posts of professor of divinity and resident tutor at New College, Hackney [ODNB].

³ Abraham Rees (1743-1825), Presbyterian minister and tutor in Hebrew and mathematics at New College, Hackney from 1786 to 1796 [ODNB].

⁴ Richard Price (1723-1791), see 18 Dec 1769.

⁵ ? William Vaughan (1752-1850), see 27 Jul 1787.

⁶ Elizabeth Rayner (d. 1800), see 17 May 1786.

⁷ Thomas Barnes (1747-1810), Presbyterian minister and reformer, and co-minister, with the Revd Ralph Harrison, at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. In doctrine Barnes was an Arian yet despite Priestley's, accusations of hostility, he signed the petition to parliament of 1792 for the repeal of the penal laws against Unitarians [David L. Wykes, 'Barnes, Thomas (1747-1810)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn.].

⁸ Barnes was the first theological tutor (and therefore principal) of the dissenting academy at Manchester. It is clear that Barnes did not find his office easy, as the college - like all institutions supported by reformers - experienced great difficulties in the period following the French Revolution. He offered his resignation in 1792, but was persuaded to continue until 1798. It was alleged subsequently that Barnes resigned because of difficulties over student discipline, but at the time he gave as his reasons the health of his wife and the incompatibility of conducting the academy and fulfilling his pastoral duties [ODNB].

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I have just received Mr Wakefield's New Translations.⁹ He is a man that no body can ever chance with, and has too many peculiarities. But good use may be made of his labours by others not particularly partial to them. I hear nothing of D^r Geddes's¹⁰ subscription.¹¹ What my plan is you will see when I come, not having found time to adjust, and transcribe it. Mr Wakefield has given a very free and, in my opinion, a just character of Mr Gibbon's History.¹² I have no thoughts of animadverting upon him, except en passant. D Levi¹³ is unworthy of any notice. I have a curious letter concerning him, and his puffs in the Papers, which ~~is~~ //however// I have not seen. I shall bring [it] with me.

I am Dear friend
yours & M^{rs} Lindsey's
most affectionately
J Priestley

P.S. My wife always desires her remembrances, and depends upon our making a better arrangement for seeing you at B-m this summer. Remember us both to M^{rs} Rayner.

⁹ Gilbert Wakefield (1756-1801), biblical scholar and religious controversialist [ODNB]. See Gilbert Wakefield, *A New Translation of those Parts only of the New Testament, which are wrongly translated in our Common Version* (London, 1789).

¹⁰ Alexander Geddes (1737-1802), see 9 Sept 1787.

¹¹ For Geddes's translation of the Bible.

¹² Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. A new edition of Gibbon's work in three volumes was published in 1789 (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell).

¹³ David Levi (1742-1801), see 11 Jun 1787.