

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH-HAW,
LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

CONTAINING

AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,

SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED

MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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LETTERS

TO MISS P——.

LETTER I.

August 17, 1776.

IT is indeed natural to us to wish and to plan, and it is merciful in the Lord to disappoint our plans, and to cross our wishes. For we cannot be safe, much less happy, but in proportion as we are weaned from our own wills, and made simply desirous of being directed by his guidance. This truth, when we are enlightened by his word, is sufficiently familiar to the judgment, but we seldom learn to reduce it into practice, without being trained a while in the school of disappointment. The schemes we form look so plausible and convenient, that when they are broken we are ready to say, What a pity! We try again, and with no better success; we are grieved, and perhaps angry, and plan out another, and so on: at length, in a course of time, experience and observation begin to convince us that we are not more able than we are worthy to choose aright for ourselves. Then the Lord's invitation to cast our cares upon him, and his promise to take care of us, appear valuable; and when we have done planning, his plan in our favour gradually opens, and he does more and better for us than we could either ask or think. I can hardly recollect a single plan of mine of which I have not since seen reason to be satisfied, that had it taken place in season and circumstance just as I proposed, it would, humanly speaking, have proved my ruin, or at least it would have deprived me of the greater good the Lord had designed for me. We judge of things by their present appearances, but the Lord sees them in their consequences. If we could do so likewise, we should be perfectly of his mind, but as we cannot, it is an unspeakable mercy that he will manage for us, whether we are pleased with his management or not; and it is spoken of as one of his heaviest judgments, when he gives any person or people up to the way of their own hearts, and to walk after their own counsels.

Indeed, we may admire his patience towards us. If we were blind, and reduced to desire a person to lead us, and should yet pretend to dispute with him, and direct him at every step, we should probably soon weary him, and provoke him to leave us to find the way by ourselves if we could. But our gracious Lord is long-suffering and full of compassion: he bears with our frowardness, yet he will take methods both to shame and to humble us, and to bring us to a confession that he is wiser than we. The great and unexpected benefit he intends us, by all the discipline we meet with, is to tread down our

wills, and bring them into subjection to his. So far as we attain to this, we are out of the reach of disappointment, for when the will of God can please us, we shall be pleased every day, and from morning to night, I mean with respect to his dispensations. O the happiness of such a life! I have an idea of it: I hope I am aiming at it, but surely I have not attained it. Self is active in my heart, if it does not absolutely reign there. I profess to believe that one thing is needful and sufficient, and yet my thoughts are prone to wander after a hundred more. If it be true that the light of his countenance is better than life, why am I solicitous about any thing else? If he be all sufficient, and gives me liberty to call him mine, why do I go a-begging to creatures for help? If he be about my path and bed; if the smallest, as well as the greatest events in which I am concerned are under his immediate direction; if the very hairs of my head are numbered; then my care (any farther than a care to walk in the paths of his precepts, and to follow the openings of his providence) must be useless and needless, yea indeed sinful and heathenish, burdensome to myself and dishonourable to my profession. Let us cast down the load we are unable to carry, and if the Lord be our shepherd, refer all and trust all to him. Let us endeavour to live to him and for him today, and be glad that tomorrow, with all that is behind it, is in his hands.

It is storied of Pompey, that when his friends would have dissuaded him from putting to sea in a storm, he answered, It is necessary for me to sail, but it is not necessary for me to live. O pompous speech, in Pompey's sense! He was full of the idea of his own importance, and would rather have died than have taken a step beneath his supposed dignity. But it may be accommodated with propriety to a believer's case. It becomes us to say, it is not necessary for me to be rich, or what the world accounts wise; to be healthy, or admired by my fellow-worms; to pass through life in a state of prosperity and outward comfort;—these things may be, or they may be otherwise, as the Lord in his wisdom shall appoint, but it is necessary for me to be humble and spiritual, to seek communion with God, to adorn my profession of the gospel, and to yield submissively to his disposal, in whatever way, whether of service or suffering, he shall be pleased to call me to glorify him in the world. It is not necessary for me to live long, but highly expedient that whilst I do live I should live to him. Here, then, I would bound my desires, and here, having his word both for my rule and my warrant, I am secured from asking amiss. Let me have his presence and his Spirit, wisdom to know my calling, and opportunities and faithfulness to improve them; and as to the rest, Lord, help me to say, What thou wilt, when thou wilt, and how thou wilt.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

DEAR MADAM,

WHAT a poor, uncertain, dying world is this! What a wilderness in itself! How dark, how desolate, without the light of the gospel and the knowledge of Jesus! It does not appear so to us in a state of nature, because we are then in a state of enchantment, the magical lantern blinding us with a splendid delusion.

Thus in the desert's dreary waste,
By magic power produced in haste,
As old romances say,
Castles and groves, and music sweet.
The senses of the trav'ler cheat.
And stop him in his way.

But while he gazes with surprise,
The charm dissolves, the vision dies,
'Twas but enchanted ground:
Thus, if the Lord our spirit touch,
The world, which promised us so much,
A wilderness is found.

It is a great mercy to be undeceived in time; and though our gay dreams are at an end, and we awake to every thing that is disgustful and dismaying, yet we see a highway through the wilderness, a powerful guard, an infallible guide at hand to conduct us through; and we can discern, beyond the limits of the wilderness, a better land, where we shall be at rest and at home. What will the difficulties we meet by the way then signify? The remembrance of them will only remain to heighten our sense of the love, care, and power of our Saviour and leader. O how shall we then admire, adore, and praise him, when he shall condescend to unfold to us the beauty, propriety, and harmony of the whole train of his dispensations towards us, and give us a clear retrospect of all the way, and all the turns of our pilgrimage!

In the mean while, the best method of adorning our profession, and of enjoying peace in our souls, is simply to trust him, and absolutely to commit ourselves and our all to his management. By casting our burdens upon him, our spirits become light and cheerful; we are freed from a thousand anxieties and disquietudes, which are wearisome to our minds, and which, with respect to events, are needless for us, yea, useless. But though it may be easy to speak of this trust, and it appears to our judgment perfectly right and reasonable, the actual attainment is a great thing; and especially so to trust the Lord, not by fits and starts, surrendering one day, and retracting the next, but to abide by our surrender, and go habitually trusting through all the changes we meet,

knowing that his love, purpose, and promise, are unchangeable. Some little faintings perhaps none are freed from; but I believe a power of trusting the Lord in good measure at all times, and living quietly under the shadow of his wing, is what the promise warrants us to expect, if we seek it by diligent prayer; if not all at once, yet by a gradual increase. May it be your experience and mine.

I am, &c.