

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
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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 MRS. H——,

LETTER I.

LONG and often have I thought of writing to you; now the time is come. May the Lord help me to send a word in season! I know not how it may be with you, but he does, and to him I look to direct my thoughts accordingly. I suppose you are still in the school of the cross, learning the happy art of extracting real good out of seeming evil, and to grow tall by stooping. The flesh is a sad untoward dunce in this school; but grace makes the spirit willing to learn by suffering; yea it cares not what it endures, so sin may be mortified, and a conformity to the image of Jesus be increased. Surely when we see the most and the best of the Lord's children so often in heaviness, and when we consider how much he loves them, and what he has done and prepared for them, we may take it for granted that there is a need-be for their sufferings. For it would be easy to his power, and not a thousandth part of what his love intends to do for them, should he make their whole life here, from the hour of their conversion to their death, a continued course of satisfaction and comfort, without any thing to distress them from within or without. But were it so, should we not miss many advantages? In the first place, we should not then be very conformable to our Head, nor be able to say, As he was, so are we in this world. Methinks a believer would be ashamed to be so utterly unlike his Lord. What! the master always a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and the servant always happy and full of comfort! Jesus despised, reproached, neglected, opposed, and betrayed, and his people admired and caressed; he living in the want of all things, and they filled with abundance; he sweating blood for anguish, and they strangers to distress: how unsuitable would these things be! how much better to be called to the honour of filling up the measure of his sufferings! A cup was put into his hand on our account, and his love engaged him to drink it for us. The wrath which it contained he drank wholly himself, but he left us a little affliction to taste, that we might pledge him, and remember how he loved us, and how much more he endured for us than he will ever call us to endure for him. Again, how could we, without sufferings, manifest the nature and truth of gospel grace? What place should we then have for patience, submission, meekness, forbearance, and a readiness to forgive, if we had nothing to try us either from the hand of the Lord, or from the hand of men. A Christian without trials would be like a mill without wind or water; the contrivance and design of the wheel-work

inside would be unnoticed and unknown, without something to put it in motion from without. Nor would our graces grow, unless they were called out to exercise: the difficulties we meet with not only prove but strengthen the graces of the Spirit. If a person was always to sit still, without making use of legs or arms, he would probably wholly lose the power of moving his limbs at last; but by walking and working he becomes strong and active. So, in a long course of ease, the powers of the new man would certainly languish: the soul would grow soft, indolent, cowardly, and faint; and therefore the Lord appoints his children such dispensations as make them strive, and struggle, and pant. They must press through a crowd, swim against a stream, endure hardships, run, wrestle, and fight; and thus their strength grows in the using.

By these things, likewise, they are made more willing to leave the present world, to which we are prone to cleave too closely in our hearts when our path is very smooth. Had Israel enjoyed their former peace and prosperity in Egypt, when Moses came to invite them to Canaan, I think they would hardly have listened to him. But the Lord suffered them to be brought into great trouble and bondage, and then the news of deliverance was more welcome; yet still they were but half willing, and they carried a love to the flesh-pots of Egypt with them into the wilderness. We are like them: though we say this world is vain and sinful, we are too fond of it; and though we hope for true happiness only in heaven, we are often well content to stay longer here. But the Lord sends afflictions one after another to quicken our desires, and to convince us that this cannot be our rest. Sometimes, if you drive a bird from one branch of a tree, he will hop to another a little higher, and from thence to a third; but if you continue to disturb him, he will at last take wing and fly quite away. Thus we, when forced from one creature-comfort, perch upon another, and so on; but the Lord mercifully follows us with trials, and will not let us rest upon any. By degrees our desires take a nobler flight, and can be satisfied with nothing short of himself; and we say, To depart and be with Jesus is best of all.

I trust you find the name and grace of Jesus more and more precious to you; his promises more sweet, and your hope in them more abiding; your sense of your own weakness and unworthiness daily increasing; and your persuasion of his all-sufficiency to guide, support, and comfort you, more confirmed. You owe your growth in these respects in a great measure to his blessing upon those afflictions which he has prepared for you, and sanctified to you. May you praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that is to come.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

THOUGH I have the pleasure of hearing of you, and sending a remembrance from time to time, I am willing, by this opportunity, to direct a few lines to you, as a more express testimony of my sincere regard.

I think your experience is generally of the fearful, doubting cast. Such souls, however, the Lord has given particular charge to his ministers to comfort. He knows our infirmities, and what temptations mean, and as a good shepherd he expresses a peculiar care and tenderness for the weak of the flock, Isaiah xl. 4. But how must I attempt your comfort? Surely not by strengthening a mistake to which we are all too liable, by leading you to look into your own heart for (what you will never find there) something in yourself whereon to ground your hopes, if not wholly, yet at least in part. Rather let me endeavour to lead you out of yourself; let me invite you to look unto Jesus. Should we look for light in our own eyes, or in the sun? Is it indwelling sin distresses you? Then I can tell you (though you know it) that Jesus died for sin and sinners. I can tell you, that his blood and righteousness are of infinite value; that his arm is almighty, and his compassions infinite; yea, you yourself read his promises every day, and why should you doubt their being fulfilled? If you say you do not question their truth, or that they are accomplished to many, but that you can hardly believe they belong to you; I would ask, what evidence you would require? A voice or an angel from heaven you do not expect. Consider, if many of the promises are not expressly directed to those to whom they belong. When you read your name on the superscription of this letter, you make no scruple to open it: why, then, do you hesitate at embracing the promises of the gospel, where you read that they are addressed to those who mourn, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are poor in spirit, &c. and cannot but be sensible that a gracious God has begun to work these dispositions in your heart? If you say, that though you do at times mourn, hunger, &c. you are afraid you do it not enough, or not aright; consider, that this sort of reasoning is very far from the spirit and language of the gospel; for it is grounded on a secret supposition, that in the forgiveness of sin God has a respect to something more than the atonement and mediation of Jesus; namely, to some previous good qualifications in a sinner's heart, which are to share with the blood of Christ in the honour of salvation. The enemy deceives us in this matter the more easily, because a propensity to the covenant of works is a part of our natural depravity. Depend upon it, you will never have a suitable and sufficient sense of the evil of sin, and of your share in it, so long as you have any sin remaining in you. We must see Jesus as he is, before our apprehensions of any spiritual truth will be complete. But if we know that we must perish without Christ, and that he is able to save to the uttermost, we know

enough to warrant us to cast our souls upon him, and we dishonour him by fearing that when we do so he will disappoint our hope. But if you are still perplexed about the high points of election, &c. I would advise you to leave the disposal of others to the great Judge; and as to yourself, I think I need not say much to persuade you, that if ever you are saved at all, it must be in a way of free and absolute grace. Leave disputes to others; wait upon the Lord, and he will teach you all things, in such degree and time as he sees best. Perhaps you have suffered for taking things too much upon trust from men. Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. One is your master, even Christ. Study and pray over the Bible; and you may take it as a sure rule, that whatever sentiment makes any part of the word of God unwelcome to you, is justly to be suspected. Aim at a cheerful spirit. The more you trust God, the better you will serve him. While you indulge unbelief and suspicion, you weaken your own hands, and discourage others. Be thankful for what he has shown you, and wait upon him for more; you shall find he has not said, "Seek ye my face in vain."

I heartily commend you to his grace and care, and am, &c.

LETTER III.

AT length, and without farther apology for my silence, I sit down to ask you, how you fare? Afflictions I hear have been your lot; and if I had not heard so, I should have taken it for granted, for I believe the Lord loves you, and as many as he loves he chastens. I think you can say afflictions have been good for you, and I doubt not but you have found strength according to your day; so that though you may have been sharply tried, you have not been overpowered. For the Lord has engaged his faithfulness for this to all his children, that he will support them in all their trials, so that the fire shall not consume them nor the floods drown them, 1 Cor. x. 13, Isa xliii. 2.

If you can say thus much, cannot you go a little further, and add, in the apostle's words, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear. I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; yea, doubtless, I count all things loss and of no regard, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for when I am weak, then am I strong." Methinks I hear you say, "God, who comforteth those who are cast down, has comforted my soul; and as my troubles have abounded, my consolations in Christ have abounded also. He has delivered, he does deliver, and in him I trust that he will yet deliver me." Surely you can set your seal to these words. The Lord help you, then, to live more and more a life of faith, to feed upon the promises, and to rejoice in the assurance that all things are yours, and shall surely work for your good.

If I guess right at what passes in your heart, the name of Jesus is precious to you; and this is a sure token of salvation, and that of God. You could not have loved him if he had not loved you first. He spoke to you, and said, "Seek my face," before your heart cried to him "Thy face, O Lord, will I seek." But you complain, "Alas! I love him so little." That very complaint proves that you love him a great deal, for if you loved him but a little, you would think you loved him enough. A mother loves her child a great deal, yet does not complain for not loving it more, nay, perhaps, she hardly thinks it possible. But such an infinite object is Jesus, that they who love him better than parents or child, or any earthly relation or comfort, will still think they hardly love him at all, because they see such a vast disproportion between the utmost they can give him and what in himself he deserves from them. But I can give you good advice and good news: love him as well as you can now, and ere long you shall love him better. O, when you see him as he is, then I am sure you will love him indeed! If you want to love him better now while you are here, I believe I can tell you the secret how this is to be attained: trust him. The more you trust him the better you will love him. If you ask farther, How shall I do to trust him? I answer, Try him. The more you make trial of him, the more your trust in him will be strengthened. Venture upon his promises;

carry them to him, and see if he will not be as good as his word. But, alas! Satan and unbelief work the contrary way. We are unwilling to try him, and therefore unable to trust him; and what wonder, then, that our love is faint, for who can love at uncertainties?

If you are in some measure thankful for what you have received, and hungering and thirsting for more, you are in the frame I would wish for myself, and I desire to praise the Lord on your behalf. Pray for us. We join in love to you.

I am, &c.