

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

THE REVEREND Mr. R———.

LETTER I.

April 15, 1776.

MY DEAR SIR,

I OFTEN rejoice on your behalf. Your call out of the world was a singular and comfortable instance of the power of grace. And when I consider the difficulties and snares of your situation, and that you have been kept in the middle path, preserved from undue compliances on the one hand, and unnecessary singularities on the other, I cannot doubt but the Lord has hitherto helped and guided you. Indeed, you have need of his guidance. At your years, and with your expectations in life, your health firm, and your natural spirits lively, you are exposed to many snares; yet, if the Lord keeps you sensible of your danger, and dependent upon him, you will walk safely. Your security, success, and comfort, depend upon him; and in the way of means, chiefly upon your being preserved in a humble sense of your own weakness. It is written, “Fear not, I am with thee.” It is written again, “Blessed is the man who feareth always.” There is a perfect harmony in those seemingly different texts. May the wisdom that cometh from above teach you and me to keep them both united in our view. If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, his arm over us, his ear open to our prayer; his grace sufficient, his promise unchangeable. Under his protection, though the path of duty should lie through fire and water, we may cheerfully and confidently pursue it. On the other hand, our hearts are so deceitful, fallible, and frail; our spiritual enemies so subtle, watchful, and powerful; and they derive so many advantages from the occasions of every day, in which we are unavoidably and unexpectedly concerned; there is so much combustible within, and so many temptations arising from without, capable of setting all in a flame; that we cannot be too jealous of ourselves and our circumstances. The duke of Devonshire’s motto, if I mistake not, well suits the Christian, *Cavendo tutus* [“safety through caution.”] When we can say, in the psalmist’s spirit, “Hold thou me up,” we may warrantably draw his conclusion, “and I shall be safe;” but the moment we lean to our own understanding, we are in imminent danger of falling. The enemy who wars against our souls is a consummate master in his way, fertile in stratagems, and equally skilful in

carrying on his assaults by sap or by storm. He studies us, if I may so say, all around, to discover our weak sides; and he is a very Proteus for changing his appearances, and can appear as a sly serpent, a roaring lion, or an angel of light, as best suits his purpose. It is a great mercy to be in some measure acquainted with his devices, and aware of them. They who wait humbly upon the Lord, and consult carefully at his word and throne of grace, are made wiser than their enemy, and enabled to escape and withstand his wiles. I know you will not expect me to apologise for putting you in mind of these things, though you know them. I have a double warrant; the love I bear you, and the Lord's command, Heb. iii. 13. Use the like freedom with me; I need it, and hope to be thankful for it, and accept it as one of the best proofs of friendship.

The Lord bless and keep you. Pray for us, and believe me to be sincerely yours.

LETTER II.

July 13, 1776.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE Lord, who mercifully called you out of a state of thoughtless dissipation, and has hitherto been with you, will, I trust, sweeten all your trials, and cause his light to shine upon your paths. It seems probable, that if you pay a just regard to your father's negative, which I really think he has a right to expect from you, and, at the same time, make a steady and conscientious use of that negative, which he generously allows you to put upon his proposals, to which I think you have an equal right; I say, while things remain in this situation, and you continue to think differently, it seems probable that the hour of your exchanging a single for the marriage state is yet at some distance. But let not this grieve you. The Lord is all-sufficient. A lively sense of his love, a deep impression of eternity, a heart filled with zeal for his cause, and a thirst for the good of souls, will, I hope, enable you to make a cheerful sacrifice of whatever has no necessary connection with your peace and his service. And you may rest assured, that whenever he, who loves you better than you do yourself, sees it best for you, upon the whole, to change your condition, he will bring it about, he will point out the person, prepare the means, and secure the success, by his providence, and the power he has over every heart. And you shall see that all previous difficulties were either gracious preventions, which he threw in the way to prevent your taking a wrong step, or temporary bars, which, by his removing them afterwards, should give you opportunity of more clearly perceiving his care and interposition in your favour. In the mean time, remember your high calling. You are a min-

ister and an ambassador of Christ; you are entrusted with the most honourable and important employment that can engage and animate the heart of man. *ταῦτα μελέτα, ἐν τούτοις ἴσθι; ἐπίμενε αὐτοῖς;* (1 Tim. iv. 15, 16.)

Filled and fired with a constraining sense of the love of Jesus, and the worth of souls; impressed with an ardour to carry war into Satan's kingdom, to storm his strongholds, and rescue his captives; you will have little leisure to think of any thing else. How does the love of glory stimulate the soldier, make him forget and forego a thousand personal tendernesses, and prompt him to cross oceans, to traverse deserts, to scale mountains, and plunge into the greatest hardships and the thickest dangers! He does it for a corruptible crown, a puff of breath, an empty fame; his highest prospect is the applause and favour of his prince. We likewise are soldiers; we have a Prince and Captain who deserves our all. They who know him, and have hearts to conceive of his excellence, and to feel their obligations to him, cannot indeed seek their own glory, but his glory is dearer to them than a thousand lives. They owe him their souls, for he redeemed them with blood, his own blood; and by his grace he subdued and pardoned them when they were rebels, and in arms against him. Therefore they are not their own, they would not be their own. When his standard is raised, when his enemies are in motion, when his people are to be rescued; they go forth clothed with his panoply, they fight under his eye, they are sure of his support, and he shows them the conqueror's crown. O, when they think of that *εὖ δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ* [*Well done, good servant*] with which he has promised to welcome them home, when the campaign is over, hard things seem easy, and bitter things sweet; they count nothing, not even their own lives, dear, so that they may finish their course with joy. May the Lord make us thus minded; give us a hearty concern for his business, and he has engaged to take care of ours; and nothing that can conduce to our real comfort and usefulness shall be withheld.

Believe me to be sincerely yours.

LETTER III.

December 21, 1776.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOUR letter brought me tidings of joy, and then furnished me with materials for a bonfire upon the occasion. It was an act of passive obedience to burn it, but I did obey. I congratulate you upon the happy issue to which the Lord has brought your affairs. I see that his good Spirit and good providence have been and are with you. I doubt not but your union with Miss —— will be a mutual blessing, and, on your part, heightened by being connected with such a family. I could enlarge upon this head, if my letter likewise was to be burnt

as soon as you have read it. I look upon the friendship the Lord has given me there as one of my prime privileges, and I hope I shall always be thankful that it proved a means of introducing you into it.

I congratulate you likewise upon your accession to ——, not because it is a good living, in a genteel neighbourhood, and a fine country, but because I believe the Lord sends you there for fulfilling the desires he has given you of being useful to souls. Church-preferment, in any other view, is dreadful; and I would as soon congratulate a man upon seeing a millstone tied about his neck, to sink him into the depths of the sea, as upon his obtaining what is called a good living, except I thought him determined to spend and be spent in the cause of the gospel. A parish is an awful millstone indeed to those who see nothing valuable in the flock but the fleece; but the Lord has impressed your heart with a sense of the glory and importance of his truth, and the worth of souls, and animated your zeal by the most powerful motive, the knowledge of his constraining love. Your case is extraordinary. Perhaps, when you review in your mind the circle of your former gay acquaintance, you may say, with Job's servant, "I only am escaped alive:" The rest are either removed into an eternal state, or are still hurrying down the stream of dissipation, and living without God in the world. Yet there was a time when there seemed no more probability on your side than on theirs, that you should obtain mercy, and be called to the honour of preaching the glorious gospel. You are setting out with every possible advantage. In early life, with a cheerful flow of spirits, affluent circumstances, and now, to crown all, the Lord gives you the very choice of your heart in a partner; one who, besides deserving and meeting your affection, will, I am persuaded, be a real help-meet to you in your spiritual walk. How much is here to be thankful for!

I trust the Lord has given you, and will maintain in you, a right spirit, so as not to rest in his gifts, but to hold them in connection with the love and favour of the giver. It is a low time with us, when the greatest assemblage of earthly blessings can seem to satisfy us without real communion with him. His grace is sufficient for you; but undoubtedly such a scene of prosperity as seems to lie before you, is full of snares, and calls for a double effort of watchfulness and prayer. Your situation will fix many eyes upon you, and Satan will doubtless watch you, and examine every corner of the hedge around you, to see if he can find a gap by which to enter. We have but few rich gospel-ministers; but it is too evident that he has found a way to damp the zeal and hurt the spirits of some of those few, who for a time acted nobly, and seemed to walk out of the reach of the allurements of the world. I am not jealous of you; I feel a comfortable persuasion, that the Lord has taken a fast hold of your heart, and given you a fast hold of his almighty arm; yet I believe you will not be displeased with me for dropping a hint of this kind, and

at this time.

You have heard of the trial with which the Lord has been pleased to visit us: it still continues, though considerably alleviated. It is tempered with many mercies, and I hope he disposes us in a measure to submission. I trust it will be for good. My dear friend you are now coming into my school, where you will learn, as occasions offer, to feel more in the person of another than in your own. But be not discouraged, the Lord only afflicts for our good. It is necessary that our sharpest trials should sometimes spring from our dearest comforts, else we should be in danger of forgetting ourselves, and setting up our rest here. In such a world, and with such hearts as we have, we shall often need something to prevent our cleaving to the dust, to quicken us to prayer, and to make us feel that our dependence for one hour's peace is upon the Lord alone. I am ready to think I have known as much of the good and happiness which this world can afford, as most people who live in it. I never saw the person with whom I wished to exchange in temporals. And for many years past I have thought my trials have been light and few, compared with what many, or most of the Lord's people have endured. And yet, though in the main possessed of my own wishes, when I look back upon the twenty-seven years past, I am ready to style them, with Jacob, few and evil; and to give the sum-total of their contents in Solomon's words,—all is vanity. If I take these years to pieces, I see a great part of them was filled up with sins, sorrows, and inquietudes. The pleasures too are gone, and have no more real existence than the baseless fabric of a dream. The shadows of the evening will soon begin to come over us; and if our lives are prolonged, a thousand pains and infirmities, from which the Lord has in a remarkable measure exempted us hitherto, will probably overtake us, and at last we must feel the parting pang. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* [*Thus passes the glory of the world.*] Sin has so envenomed the soil of this earth, that the amaranth will not grow upon it. But we are hasting to a better world, and to bright unclouded skies, where our sun will no more go down, and where all tears shall be wiped from our eyes.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

September 21, 1777.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

MR. ——— called upon us on Thursday evening, and from that hour my thoughts, when awake, have seldom been absent from ———. Few people are better qualified to feel for you, yourself and the family excepted; perhaps there is no person living more nearly interested in what concerns Mrs. ——— than myself. I could not therefore, at such a time as this, refrain from

writing; and glad should I be, if the Lord may help me to drop a suitable word, and accompany it with a blessing to you in the reading.

I am glad to be assured, though I expected no less, that Mrs. —— happily feels herself safe in the Lord's hand, and under the care of the Good Shepherd and Saviour, to whom she has often committed herself; and finds him faithful to his promise, giving her strength in her soul according to her day, and enabling her quietly to submit to his holy, wise, and gracious will. And it is my prayer, that he may strengthen you likewise, and reveal his own all-sufficiency so clearly and powerfully to your heart, that you may not be afraid of any event, but cheerfully rely upon him, to be all that to you, in every circumstance and change, which his promise warrants you to expect.

I am willing to hope, that this is but a short season of anxiety, appointed for the exercise of your faith and patience, and to give you, in his good time, a signal proof of his power and goodness in answering prayer. He sometimes brings us into such a situation that the help of creatures is utterly unavailing, that we may afterwards be more clearly sensible of his interposition. Then we experimentally learn the vanity of all things here below, and are brought to a more immediate and absolute dependence upon himself. We have need of having these lessons frequently inculcated upon us; but when his end is answered, how often, after he has caused grief, does he show his great compassions, and save us from our fears by an outstretched arm, and such a seasonable and almost unexpected relief, as constrains us to cry out, What has God wrought? and who is a God like unto thee? Such, I hope, will be the issue of your present trial, and that he who gave her to you at first will restore her to you again. I see you in the furnace; but the Lord is sitting by it as a refiner of silver, to moderate the fire, and manage the process, so that you shall lose nothing but dross, and be brought forth refined as gold, to praise his name. Apparent difficulties, however great, are nothing to him. If he speaks it is done; for to God the Lord belong the issues from death. Should his pleasure be otherwise, and should he call your dear partner to a state of glory before you, still I know he is able to support you. What he does, however painful to the flesh, must be right, because he does it. Having bought us with his blood, and saved our souls from hell, he has every kind of right to dispose of us and ours as he pleases; and this we are sure of, he will not lay so much upon us as he freely endured for us, and he can make us amends for all we suffer, and for all we lose, by the light of his countenance. A few years will set all to rights; and they who love him and are beloved by him, though they may suffer as others, shall not sorrow as others, for the Lord will be with them here, and he will soon have them with him; there all tears shall be wiped from their eyes.

Perhaps I know as well how to calculate the pain of such a separation as any one who has not actually experienced it. Many a time the desire of my

eyes has been threatened, many a time my heart has been brought low; but from what I have known at such seasons, I have reason to hope, that had it been his pleasure to bring upon me the thing that I feared, his everlasting arm would have upheld me from sinking under the stroke. As ministers, we are called to comfort the Lord's afflicted people, and to tell them, the knowledge of his love is a cordial able to keep the soul alive under the sharpest trials. We must not wonder that he sometimes put us in a way of showing that we do not deal in unfelt truths, but that we find ourselves that solid consolation in the gospel which we encourage others to expect from it. You have now such an occasion of glorifying the Lord, I pray he may enable you to improve it, and that all around you may see that he is with you, and that his good word is the support and anchor of your soul. Then I am sure, if it upon the whole is best for you, he will give you the desire of your heart, and you shall yet live to praise him together.

I am, &c.