

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.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

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LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. B———,

LETTER I.

September 14, 1765.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

WHEN I was at London, in June last, your name first reached me, and from that time I have been desirous to wish you success in the name of the Lord. A few weeks ago, I received a farther account from Mrs. ——, with a volume of your sermons: she likewise gave me a direction where to write, and an encouragement that a letter would not be unacceptable. The latter, indeed, I did not much need, when I had read your book. Though we have no acquaintance, we are already united in the strictest ties of friendship, partakers of the same hope, servants of the same Lord, and in the same part of his vineyard: I therefore hold all apologies needless. I rejoice in the Lord's goodness to you; I pray for his abundant blessing upon your labours; I need an interest in your prayers: I have an affectionate desire to know more concerning you: these are my motives for writing.

Mrs. —— tells me that you have read my Narrative: I need not tell you, therefore, that I am one of the most astonishing instances of the forbearance and mercy of God upon the face of the earth. In the close of it, I mention a warm desire I had to the ministry: this the Lord was pleased to keep alive for several years, through a succession of views and disappointments. At length his hour came, and my way was made easy. I have been here about fifteen months. The Lord has led me, by a way that I little expected, to a pleasant lot, where the gospel has been many years known, and is highly valued by many. We have a large church and congregation, and a considerable number of lively thriving believers, and in general go on with great comfort and harmony. I meet with less opposition from the world than is usual where the gospel is preached. This burden was borne by Mr. B—— for ten years, and in that course of time, some of the fiercest opposers were removed, some wearied, and some softened; so that we are now remarkably quiet in that respect. May the Lord teach us to improve the privilege, and preserve us from indifference. How unspeakable are our obligations to the grace of God! What a privilege it is to be a believer! They are comparatively few, and we by nature were no nearer than others; it was grace, free grace, that made the difference. What an honour to be a minister of the everlasting gospel! These, upon comparison, are perhaps fewer still. How wonderful that one of these

few should be sought for among the wilds of Africa, reclaimed from the lowest state of impiety and misery, and brought to assure other sinners, from his own experience, that “there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared.” And you, Sir, though not left to give such flagrant proofs of the wickedness of the heart and the power of Satan, yet owe your present views to the same almighty grace. If the Lord had not distinguished you from your brethren, you would have been now in the character of a minister misleading the people, and opposing those precious truths you are now labouring to establish. Not unto us, O Lord! but unto thy name be the glory. I shall be thankful to hear from you at your leisure. Be pleased to inform me, whether you received the knowledge of the truth before or since you were in orders; how long you have preached the joyful sound of salvation by Jesus, and what is the state of things in your parts.

We are called to an honourable service, but it is arduous. What wisdom does it require to keep the middle path in doctrines, avoiding the equally dangerous errors on the right hand and the left! What steadiness, to speak the truth boldly and faithfully in the midst of a gainsaying world! What humility, to stand against the tide of popularity! What meekness, to endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may be saved! “Who is sufficient for these things?” We are not in ourselves, but there is an all-sufficiency in Jesus. Our enemy watches us close; he challenges and desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat; he knows he can easily shake us, if we are left to ourselves; but we have a Shepherd, a Keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps. If he permits us to be exercised, it is for our good; he is at hand to direct, moderate, and sanctify every dispensation; he has prayed for us, that our faith may not fail, and he has promised to maintain his fear in our hearts, that we may not depart from him. When we are prone to wander, he calls us back; when we say, My feet slip, his mercy holds us up; when we are wounded, he heals; when we are ready to faint, he revives. The people of God are sure to meet with enemies, but especially the ministers: Satan bears them a double grudge: the world watches for their halting, and the Lord will suffer them to be afflicted, that they may be kept humble, that they may acquire a sympathy with the sufferings of others, that they may be experimentally qualified to advise and help them, and to comfort them with the comforts with which they themselves have been comforted of God. But the Captain of our salvation is with us; his eye is upon us, his everlasting arms beneath us; in his name, therefore, we may go on, lift up our banners, and say, “If God be for us, who can be against us? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.” The time is short: yet a little while, and he will wipe all tears from our eyes, and put a crown of life upon our head with his own gracious hand. In this sense, how beautiful are those lines:

—————Temporis illius
Me consoler imagine;
Festis quum populus me reducem choris,
Faustisque excipiet vocibus, et Dei
Pompa cum celebri, me comitabitur
Augusta ad penetralia.

Buch, in Psal. xlii.

If any occasions should call you into these parts, my house and pulpit
will be glad to receive you. Pray for us, dear Sir, and believe me to be,
Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

November 2, 1765.

VERY DEAR SIR,

YOUR letter of the 4th ult. gave me great pleasure. I thank you for the particular account you have favoured me with. I rejoice with you, sympathize with you, and find my heart opened to correspond with unreserved freedom. May the Lord direct our pens, and help us to help each other. The work you are engaged in is great, and your difficulties many; but faithful is he that hath called you, who also will do it. The weapons which he has now put in your hands are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. Men may fight, but they shall not prevail against us, if we are but enabled to put our cause simply into the Lord's hands, and keep steadily on in the path of duty. He will plead our cause, and fight our battles; he will pardon our mistakes, and teach us to do better. My experience as a minister is but small, having been but about eighteen months in the vineyard; but for about twelve years I have been favoured with an increasing acquaintance among the people of God, of various ranks and denominations, which, together with the painful exercises of my own heart, gave me opportunity of making observations which were of great use to me when I entered upon the work myself; and ever since, I have found the Lord graciously supplying new lights and new strength as new occurrences arise. So, I trust it will be with you. I endeavour to avail myself of the examples, advice, and sentiments of my brethren, yet at the same time to guard against calling any man master. This is the peculiar of Christ. The best are but men: the wisest may be mistaken; and that which may be right in another, may be wrong in me, through a difference of circumstances. The Spirit of God distributes variously, both in gifts and dispensations; and I would no more be tied to act strictly by others rules, than to walk in shoes of the same size. My shoes must fit my own feet.

I endeavour to guard against extremes; our nature is prone to them; and we are liable likewise, when we have found the inconvenience of one extreme, to revert insensibly (sometimes to fly suddenly) to the other. I pray to be led in the midst of the path. I am what they call a Calvinist; yet there are flights, niceties, and hard sayings, to be found among some of that system, which I do not choose to imitate. I dislike those sentiments against which you have borne your testimony in the note at the end of your preface; but having known many precious souls in that party, I have been taught, that the kingdom of God is not in names and sentiments, but in righteousness, faith, love, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. I should, however, upon some occasions, oppose those tenets, if they had any prevalence in my neighbourhood; but they have not; and in general, I believe, the surest way to refute or prevent

error, is to preach the truth. I am glad to find you are aware of that spirit of enthusiasm which has so often broken loose and blemished hopeful beginnings, and that the foundation you build upon is solid and scriptural: this will, I hope, save you much trouble, and prevent many offences. Let us endeavour to make our people acquainted with the scriptures, and to impress them with a high sense of its authority, excellence, and sufficiency. Satan seldom remarkably imposes on ministers or people, except where the word of God is too little consulted or regarded. Another point in which I aim at a medium, is in what is called prudence. There is certainly such a thing as Christian prudence, and a remarkable deficiency of it is highly inconvenient. But caution too often degenerates into cowardice; and if the fear of man, under the name of prudence, gets within our guard, like a chilling frost, it nips everything in the bud. Those who trust the Lord, and act openly with an honest freedom and consistence, I observe, he generally bears them out, smooths their way, and makes their enemies their friends, or at least restrains their rage; while such as halve things, temporise, and aim to please God and man together, meet with double disappointment, and are neither useful nor respected. If we trust to him, he will stand by us; if we regard men, he will leave us to make the best we can of them.

I have set down hastily what occurred to my pen, not to dictate to you, but to tell you how I have been led, and because some expressions in your letter seemed to imply that you would not be displeased with me for so doing. As to books, I think there is a medium here likewise. I have read too much in time past; yet I do not wholly join with some of our brethren, who would restrain us entirely to the word of God. Undoubtedly this is the fountain; here we should dwell: but a moderate and judicious perusal of other authors may have its use; and I am glad to be beholden to such helps, either to explain what I do not understand, or to confirm me in what I do. Of these, the writings of the last age afford an immense variety.

But above all, may we, dear Sir, live and feed upon the precious promises, John xiv. 16, 17, 26. and xvi. 13–15. There is no teacher like Jesus, who, by his Holy Spirit, reveals himself in his word to the understanding and affections of his children. When we thus behold his glory in the gospel-glass, we are changed into the same image. Then our hearts melt, our eyes flow, our stammering tongues are unloosed. That this may be your increasing experience is the prayer of, dear Sir,

Yours, &c.

LETTER III.

January 21, 1766.

DEAR SIR,

YOUR letters give me the sincerest pleasure. Let us believe that we are daily thinking of and praying for each other, and write when opportunity offers without apologies. I praise the Lord he has led you so soon to a settled judgment in the leading truths of the gospel. For want of this, many have been necessitated with their own hands to pull down what, in the first warm emotions of their zeal, they had laboured hard to build. It is a mercy likewise, to be enabled to acknowledge what is excellent in the writings or conduct of others, without adopting their singularities, or discarding the whole on account of a few blemishes. We should be glad to receive instruction from all, and avoid being led by the *ipse dixit* of any. *Nullius jurare in verbum*, is a fit motto for those who have one master, even Christ. We may grow wise apace in opinions, by books and men; but vital, experimental knowledge, can only be received from the Holy Spirit, the great instructor, and comforter of his people. And there are two things observable in his teaching: 1. That he honours the means of his own appointment, so that we cannot expect to make any great progress without diligence on our parts. 2. That he does not teach all at once, but by degrees. Experience is his school; and by this I mean the observation and improvement of what passes within us and around us in the course of every day. The word of God affords a history in miniature of the heart of man, the devices of Satan, the state of the world, and the method of grace. And the most instructing and affecting commentary on it to an enlightened mind, may be gathered from what we see, feel, and hear, from day to day. *Res, ætas, usus, semper aliquid apponent novi*; and no knowledge in spiritual things but what we acquire in this way is properly our own, or will abide the time of trial. This is not always sufficiently considered: we are ready to expect that others should receive upon our word, in half an hour's time, those views of things which have cost us years to attain. But none can be brought forward faster than the Lord is pleased to communicate inward light. Upon this ground controversies have been multiplied among Christians to little purpose, for plants of different standings will be (*ceteris paribus*) in different degrees of forwardness. A young Christian is like a green fruit; it has perhaps a disagreeable austerity, which cannot be corrected out of its proper course; it wants time and growth: wait a while, and by the nourishment it receives from the root, together with the action of the sun, wind, and rain, in succession from without, it will insensibly acquire that flavour and maturity, for the want of which an unskilful judge would be ready to reject it as nothing worth. We are favoured with many excellent books in our tongue; but I, with you, agree in assigning one of the first places, as a teacher, to Dr.

Owen. I have just finished his discourse on the Holy Spirit, which is an epitome, if not the master-piece, of his writings. I should be glad to see the republication you speak of: but I question if the booksellers will venture upon it. I shall perhaps mention it to my London friends. As to archbishop Leighton, besides his select works, there are two octavo volumes published at Edinburgh, in the year 1748, and since reprinted at London. They contain a valuable commentary on St. Peter's First Epistle, and lectures on Isa. vi.; Psal. xxxix., cxxx.; Rom. iv. and a part of chap. xii. I have likewise a small quarto in Latin, of his Divinity Lectures, when professor at Edinburgh; the short title is, *Preelectiones Theologiae*. Mine was printed in London, 1698. I believe this book is scarce; I set the highest value upon it. He has wonderfully united the simplicity of the gospel, with all the captivating beauties of style and language. Bishop Burnet says, he was the greatest master of the Latin tongue he ever knew, of which, together with his compass of learning, he has given proof in his lectures: yet in his gayer dress, his eminent humility and spirituality appear to no less advantage than when clad in plain English. I think it may be said to be a diamond set in gold. I could wish it translated, if it was possible (which I almost question) to preserve the beauty and spirit of the original.

Edwards on Free-will I have read with pleasure, as a good answer to the proud reasoners in their own way; but a book of that sort cannot be generally read: where the subject-matter is unpleasing, and the method of treating it requires more attention than the Athenian spirit of the times will bear, I wonder not if it is uncalled for, and am afraid we shall not see him upon Original Sin, if it depends upon the sale of the other. His answer to Dr. Taylor, which you speak of, is not a MS. but has been already printed at Boston.

You send us good news indeed, that two more of your brethren are declaring on the gospel side. The Lord confirm and strengthen them, add yet to your numbers, and make you helps and comforts to each other. Surely he is about to spread his work. Happy those whom he honours to be fellow-workers with him. Let us account the disgrace we suffer for his name's sake to be our great honour. Many will be against us, but there are more for us. All the praying souls on earth, all the glorified saints in heaven, all the angels of God, yea the God of angels himself, are on our side. Satan may rage, but he is a chained enemy. Men may contradict and fight, but they cannot prevail. Two things we shall especially need, courage and patience that we neither faint before them, nor upon any provocation act in their spirit. If we can pity and pray for them, return good for evil, make them sensible that we bear them a hearty good-will, and act as the disciples of him who wept for his enemies and prayed for his murderers; in this way we shall find the Lord will plead our cause, soften opposers and by degrees give us a measure of outward

peace. Warmth and imprudence have often added to the necessary burden of the cross.

I rejoice that the Lord has led you in a different way, and I hope your doctrine and example will make your path smoother every day: you find it so in part already. As the Lord brings you out a people witnesses for you to the truth of his word, you will find advantage in bringing them often together. The interval from Sabbath to Sabbath is a good while, and affords time for the world and Satan to creep in. Intermediate meetings for prayer, &c. when properly conducted, are greatly useful. I could wish for larger sheets and longer leisure, but I am constrained to say adieu, in our dear Lord and Saviour

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

December 12, 1767.

DEAR SIR

THIS is not intended as an answer to your last acceptable letter, but an occasional line, in consequence of the account Mr. T —— has given me of your late illness. I trust this dispensation will be useful to you, and I wish the knowledge of it may be so to me. I am favoured with an unusual share of health and an equal flow of spirits. If the blow you have received should be a warning to me, I shall have cause to be thankful. I am glad to hear you are better: I hope the Lord has no design to disable you from service, but rather (as he did Jacob) to strengthen you by wounding you; to maintain and increase in you that conviction which, through grace, you have received, of the vanity and uncertainty of everything below; to give you a lively sense of the value of health and opportunities, and to add to the treasury of your experience new proofs of his power and goodness in supporting, comforting, and healing you, and likewise to quicken the prayers of your people for you, and to stir them up to use double diligence in the present improvement of the means of grace, while by this late instance they see how soon and suddenly you might have been removed from them.

I understand you did not feel that lively exercise of faith and joy which you would have hoped to have found at such a season; but let not this discourage you from a firm confidence that, when the hour of dismissal shall come, the Lord will be faithful to his gracious promise, and give you strength sufficient to encounter and vanquish your last enemy. You had not this strength lately, because you needed it not; for, though you might think yourself near to death, the Lord intended to restore you, and he permitted you to feel weakness, that you might know your strength does not consist in grace received, but in his fulness, and his promise to communicate from himself as your occasions require. O, it is a great thing to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus! but it is a hard lesson: it is not easy to understand it in theory, but when the Lord has taught us so far, it is still more difficult to reduce our knowledge to practice. But this is one end he has in view in permitting us to pass through such a variety of inward and outward exercises, that we may cease from trusting in ourselves, or in any creature, or frame, or experiences, and be brought to a state of submission and dependence upon him alone. I was once visited something in the same way, seized with a fit of the apoplectic kind, which held me near an hour, and left a disorder in my head, which quite broke the scheme of life I was then in, and was consequently one of the means the Lord appointed to bring me into the ministry; but I soon perfectly recovered. From the remembrance Mrs. —— has of what she then suffered, she knows how to sympathize with Mrs. B—— in her share of your trial.

And I think dear Mr.——— some years since had a sudden stroke on a Christmas day, which disabled him from duty for a time. To him and to me these turns were only like the caution which Philip of Macedon ordered to be repeated to him every morning, “Remember thou art a man.” I hope it will be no more to you, but that you shall live to praise him, and to give many cause to praise him on your behalf. Blessed be God we are in safe hands: the Lord himself is our keeper; nothing befalls us but what is adjusted by his wisdom and love. Health is his gift, and sickness, when sanctified, is a token of love likewise. Here we may meet with many things which are not joyous but grievous to the flesh; but he will, in one way or other, sweeten every bitter cup, and ere long he will wipe away all tears from our eyes. O that joy, that crown, that glory which awaits the believer! Let us keep the prize of our high calling in view, and press forward in the name of Jesus the Redeemer, and he will not disappoint our hopes.

I am but just come off from a journey, am weary, and it grows late; I must therefore break off. When you have leisure and strength to write, oblige me with a confirmation of your recovery, for I shall be something anxious about you.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

March 14, 1775.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I THOUGHT you long in writing, but am afraid I have been longer. A heavy family affliction called me from home in December, which put me out of my usual course, and threw me behind-hand in my correspondence; yet I did not suspect the date of your last letter was so old by two months as I find it. Whether I write more frequently or more seldom, the love of my heart to you is the same, and I shall believe the like of you; yet, if it can be helped, I hope the interval will not be so long again on either side. I am glad that the Lord's work still flourishes in your parts, and that you have a more comfortable prospect at home than formerly; and I was pleased with the acceptance you found at S—— which I hope will be an earnest of greater things. I think affairs in general, with respect to this land, have a dark appearance; but it is comfortable to observe, that, amidst the aboundings of iniquity, the Lord is spreading his gospel, and that though many oppose, yet in most places whither the word is sent, great numbers seem disposed to hear. I am going (if the Lord please) into Leicestershire on Friday. This was lately such a dark place as you describe your country to be, and much of it is so still; but the Lord has visited three of the principal towns with gospel-light. I have a desire of visiting these brethren in the vineyard, to bear my poor testimony to the truths they preach, and to catch, if I may, a little fire and fervour among them. I do not often go abroad; but I have found a little excursion now and then (when the way is made plain) has its advantages, to quicken the spirits and enlarge the sphere of observation. On these accounts the recollection of my N—— journey gives me pleasure to this day; and very glad should I be to repeat it, but the distance is so great that I consider it rather as desirable than practicable.

My experiences vary as well as yours: but possibly your sensations, both of the sweet and of the bitter, may be stronger than mine. The enemy assaults me more by sap than storm, and I am ready to think I suffer more by languor than some of my friends do by the sharper conflicts to which they are called. So likewise in these seasons, which comparatively I call my best hours, my sensible comforts are far from lively. But I am in general enabled to hold fast my confidence, and to venture myself upon the power, faithfulness, and compassion of that adorable Saviour, to whom my soul has been directed and encouraged to flee for refuge. I am a poor, changeable, inconsistent creature; but he deals graciously with me; he does not leave me wholly to myself; but I have such daily proofs of the malignity and efficacy of the sin that dwelleth in me, as ought to cover me with shame and confusion of face and make me thankful if I am permitted to rank with the meanest of those who sit at his

feet. That I was ever called to the knowledge of his salvation, was a singular instance of his sovereign grace; and that I am still preserved in the way, in defiance of all that has arisen from within and from without to turn me aside, must be wholly ascribed to the same sovereignty: and if, as I trust, he shall be pleased to make me a conqueror at last, I shall have peculiar reason to say, Not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy name, O Lord, be the glory and the praise!

How oft have sin and Satan strove
To rend my soul from thee, my God!
But everlasting is thy love,
And Jesus seals it with his blood.

The Lord leads me in the course of my preaching to insist much on a life of communion with himself, and of the great design of the gospel to render us conformable to him in love; and as by his mercy nothing appears in any outward conduct remarkably to contradict what I say, many who only can judge by what they see, suppose I live a very happy life. But, alas! if they knew what passes in my heart, how dull my spirit is in secret, and how little I am myself affected by the glorious truths I propose to others, they would form a different judgment. Could I be myself what I recommend to them, I should be happy indeed. Pray for me, my dear friend, that now the Lord is bringing forward the pleasing spring, he may favour me with a spring-season in my soul; for indeed I mourn under a long winter.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

April 16, 1772.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HOPE the Lord has contracted my desires and aims almost to the one point of study, the knowledge of his truth. All other acquisitions are transient and comparatively vain. And yet, alas! I am a slow scholar; nor can I see in what respect I get forward, unless that every day I am more confirmed in the conviction of my own emptiness and inability to all spiritual good. And as, notwithstanding this, I am still enabled to stand my ground, I would hope, since no effect can be without an adequate cause, that I have made some advance, though in a manner imperceptible to myself, towards a more simple dependence upon Jesus as my all in all. It is given me to thirst and to taste, if it is not given me to drink abundantly; and I would be thankful for the desire. I see and approve the wisdom, grace, suitableness, and sufficiency of the gospel-salvation; and since it is for sinners, and I am a sinner, and the promises are open, I do not hesitate to call it mine. I am a weary, laden soul; Jesus has invited me to come, and has enabled me to put my trust in him. I seldom have an uneasy doubt, at least not of any continuance, respecting my pardon, acceptance, and interest in all the blessings of the New Testament. And, amidst a thousand infirmities and evils under which I groan, I have the testimony of my conscience when under the trial of his word, that my desire is sincerely towards him, that I choose no other portion, that I allowedly serve no other master. When I told our friend —— lately to this purpose, he wondered and asked, “How is it possible that if you can say these things, you should not be always rejoicing?” Undoubtedly I derive from the gospel a peace at bottom which is worth more than a thousand worlds; but so it is, I can only speak for myself, though I rest and live upon the truths of the gospel, they seldom impress me with a warm and lively joy. In public, indeed, I sometimes seem in earnest and much affected, but even then it appears to me rather as a part of the gift intrusted to me for the edification of others, than as a sensation which is properly my own. For when I am in private, I am usually dull and stupid to a strange degree, or the prey to a wild and ungoverned imagination; so that I may truly say, when I would do good, evil, horrid evil, is present with me. Ah, how different is this from sensible comfort! and if I was to compare myself with others, to make their experience my standard, and was not helped to retreat to the sure word of God as my refuge, how hard should I find it to maintain a hope that I had either part or lot in the matter. What I call my good times are, when I can find my attention in some little measure fixed to what I am about, which, indeed, is not always nor frequently my case in prayer, and still seldomer in reading the scriptures. My judgment embraces these means as blessed privileges, and Satan has not prevailed to drive me from

them; but in the performance, I too often find them tasks, feel a reluctance when the seasons return and am glad when they are finished. O what a mystery is the heart of man! What a warfare is the life of faith, at least in the path the Lord is pleased to lead me! What reason have I to lie in the dust as the chief of sinners and what cause for thankfulness that salvation is wholly of grace. Notwithstanding all my complaints, it is still true that Jesus died and rose again, that he ever liveth to make intercession, and is able to save to the uttermost. But, on the other hand, to think of that joy of heart in which some of his people live, and to compare it with that apparent deadness and want of spirituality which I feel, this makes me mourn. However, I think there is a scriptural distinction between faith and feeling grace and comfort; they are not inseparable, and perhaps when together, the degree of the one is not often the just measure of the other. But though I pray that I may be ever longing and panting for the light of his countenance, yet I would be so far satisfied, as to believe the Lord has wise and merciful reasons for keeping me so short of the comforts which he has taught me to desire and value more than the light of the sun.

I am, &c.