

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.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

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LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. P———

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

THE account which I received by Mr. C——, and by the letter which he brought from you, of your welfare and the welfare of your people, was very pleasing, though indeed no more than I expected. I believed, from the first of your going to S——, that you would like the people, and I believed the Lord had given you that frame of spirit which he has promised to bless. What reason have we to praise him for the knowledge of his gospel, and for the honour of being called to preach it to others! and likewise that he has been pleased to cast your lot and mine amongst a people who value it, and to crown our poor labours with some measure of acceptance and usefulness. How little did we think, in the unawakened part of our life, to what it was his good pleasure to reserve us!

The Lord is pleased, in a measure, to show me the suitableness and necessity of a humble dependent frame of heart, a ceasing from self, and a reliance upon him in the due use of appointed means; I am far from having attained, but I hope I am pressing, at least seeking after it. I wish to speak the word simply and experimentally, and to be so engaged with the importance of the subject, the worth of souls, and the thought that I am speaking in the name and presence of the Most High God, as that I might, if possible, forget everything else. This would be an attainment indeed! More good might be expected from a broken discourse, delivered in such a frame, than from the most advantageous display of knowledge and gifts without it. Not that I would undervalue propriety and pertinence of expression; it is our duty to study to find out acceptable words, and to endeavour to appear as workmen that need not be ashamed; but those who have most ability in this way, have need of a double guard of grace and wisdom, lest they be tempted to trust in it, or to value themselves upon it. They that trust in the Lord shall never be moved; and they that abase themselves before him, he will exalt. I am well persuaded that your conduct and views have been agreeable to these sentiments; and therefore the Lord has supported, encouraged, and owned you; and I trust he will still bless you, and make you a blessing to many. He that walketh humbly walketh surely.

Believe me to be, &c.

LETTER II.

August 14, 1770.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR letter did me good when I received it, at least gave me much pleasure; and I think it has given me a lift while I have been just now reading it. I know not that I ever had those awful views of sin which you speak of; and though I believe I should be better for them, I dare not seriously wish for them. There is a petition which I have heard in public prayer, "Lord, show us the evil of our hearts." To this petition I cannot venture to set my Amen, at least not without a qualification. Show me enough of thyself to balance the view, and then show me what thou pleasest. I think I have a very clear and strong conviction in my judgment, that I am vile and worthless, that my heart is full of evil, only evil, and that continually. I know something of it too experimentally; and therefore, judging of the whole by the sample, though I am not suitably affected with what I do see, I tremble at the thought of seeing more. A man may look with some pleasure upon the sea in a storm, provided he stands safe upon the land himself; but to be upon the sea in a storm, is quite another thing. And yet surely the coldness, worldliness, pride, and twenty other evils under which I groan, owe much of their strength to the want of that feeling sense of my own abominations with which you have been favoured:—I say favoured; for I doubt not but the Lord gave it you in mercy, and that it has proved, and will prove, a mercy to you, to make you more humble, spiritual, and dependent, as well as to increase your ability for preaching the gospel of his grace. Upon these accounts, I can assure you, that upon a first reading, and till I stopped a moment to count the cost, I was ready to envy you all that you had felt. I often seem to know what the scriptures teach, both of sin and grace, as if I knew them not: so faint and languid are my perceptions, I often seem to think and talk of sin without any sorrow, and of grace without any joy.

I have had some people awakened by dreams, as you had by streamers; but, for ought I know, we are no less instrumental to the good of these, than to any other person, upon whom, when we look, our hearts are ready to exult, and say, See what the Lord has done by me. I do not think that, strictly speaking, all the streamers of the north are able to awaken a dead soul. I suppose people may be terrified by them, and made thoughtful, but awakened only by the word. The streamers either sent them to hear the gospel, or roused them to attend to it; but it was the knowledge of the truth brought home to the heart, that did the business. Perhaps the streamers reminded them of what they had heard from you before. Two persons here, who lived like heathens, and never came to church, were alarmed by some terrifying dreams, and came out to hearing forthwith. There the Lord was pleased to meet with them. One of them died triumphing; the other, I hope, will do so when her time

comes. Whatever means, instruments, or occasions he is pleased to employ, the work is all his own; and I trust you and I are made willing to give him all the glory, and to sink into the dust at the thought that he should ever permit us to take his holy name in our polluted lips.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

June 13, 1772.

MY DEAR SIR,

You say that your experience agrees with mine. It must be so, because our hearts are alike. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, destitute of good, and prone to evil. This is the character of mankind universally, and those who are made partakers of grace are renewed but in part; the evil nature still cleaves to them, and the root of sin, though mortified, is far from being dead. While the cause remains it will have its effects, and while we are burdened with the body of this death, we must groan under it. But we need not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, since we have in Jesus, a Saviour, a righteousness, an advocate, a shepherd. "He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust." If sin abounds in us, grace abounds much more in him; nor would he suffer sin to remain in his people, if he did not know how to over-rule it, and make it an occasion of endearing his love and grace so much the more to their souls. The Lord forbid that we should plead his goodness as an encouragement to sloth and indifference. Humiliation, godly sorrow, and self-abasement become us; but at the same time, we may rejoice in the Lord. Though sin remains, it shall not have dominion over us; though it wars in us, it shall not prevail against us. We have a mercy-seat sprinkled with blood, we have an advocate with the Father, we are called to this warfare, and we fight under the eye of the Captain of our salvation, who is always near to renew our strength, to heal our wounds, and to cover our heads in the heat of battle. As ministers, we preach to those who have like passions and infirmities with ourselves, and by our own feelings, fears, and changes, we learn to speak a word in season to them that are weary, to warn those who stand, and to stretch out a hand of compassion towards them that are fallen; and to commend it to others, from our own experience, as a faithful saying, that Jesus came to save the chief of sinners. Besides, if the Lord is pleased to give us some liberty, acceptance, and success in preaching the gospel, we should be in great danger of running mad with spiritual pride, if the Lord did not permit us to feel the depravity and vileness of our hearts, and thereby keep us from forgetting what we are in ourselves.

With regard to your young people, you must expect to meet with some disappointment. Perhaps not every one of whom you have conceived hopes will stand, and some who do belong to the Lord are permitted to make sad mistakes for their future humiliation. It is our part to watch, warn, and admonish, and we ought likewise to be concerned for those slips and miscarriages which we cannot prevent. A minister, if faithful, and of a right spirit,

can have no greater joy than to see his people walking honourably and steadily in the truth; and hardly anything will give him more sensible grief, than to see any of them taken in Satan's wiles. Yet still the gospel brings relief here. He is wiser than we are, and knows how to make those things subservient to promote his work, which we ought to guard against as evils and hindrances. We are to use the means. He is to rule the whole. If the faults of some are made warnings to others, and prove in the end occasions of illustrating the riches of divine grace, this should reconcile us to what we cannot help, though such considerations should not slacken our diligence in sounding an alarm, and reminding our hearers of their continual danger.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV

Jan. 26, 1775.

DEAR SIR,

I LATELY read, in the fifth volume of the Morning Exercises, a sermon of Mr. Baxter's, on Matth. v. 16. My mind is something impressed with the subject, and with his manner of treating it. Some of Mr. Baxter's sentiments in divinity are rather cloudy, and he sometimes, upon that account, met with but poor quarter from the staunch Calvinists of his day. But, by what I have read of him, where he is quiet, and not ruffled by controversy, he appears to me, notwithstanding some mistakes, to have been one of the greatest men of his age, and perhaps in fervour, spirituality, and success, more than equal, both as a minister and a Christian, to some twenty taken together, of those who affect to undervalue him in this present day. There is a spirit in some passages of his "Saints Rest," his "Dying Thoughts," and other of his practical treatises, compared with which, many modern compositions, though well written and well meant, appear to me to great disadvantage. But I was speaking of his sermon. He points out the way at which we should aim to let our light shine in the world, for the glory of God, and the conviction and edification of men. I have mentioned where it is to be found, that, if you have the Morning Exercises, or if they should come in your way, you may look at it. I think you would like it. The perusal suggested to me some instruction, and much reproof. Alas! my friend, are we not too often chargeable with a sad, shameful selfishness and narrowness of spirit, far, very far different from that activity, enlargement, and generosity of soul, which such a gospel as we have received might be expected to produce? For myself I must plead guilty. It seems as if my heart was always awake, and keenly sensible to my own concerns, while those of my Lord and Master affect me much less forcibly, at least only by intervals. Were a stranger to judge of me by what I sometimes say in the pulpit, he might think that, like the angels, I had but two things in view—to do the will of God, and to behold his face. But, alas? would he not be almost as much mistaken, as if, seeing Mr. G—— in the character of a tragedy-hero, he should suppose him to be the very person whom he only represents? I hope Satan will never be able to persuade me that I am a mere hypocrite and stage-player; but sure I am, that there is so much hypocrisy in me, so many littlenesses and self-seekings insinuating into my plan of conduct, that I have humbling cause to account myself unworthy and unprofitable, and to say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord," I have some tolerable idea of what a Christian ought to be, and it is, I hope, what I desire to be. A Christian should be conformable to Christ in his spirit and in his practice; that is, he should be spiritually-minded, dead to the world, filled

with zeal for the glory of God, the spread of the gospel, and the good of souls. He should be humble, patient, meek, cheerful, thankful under all events and changes. He should account it the business and honour of his life to imitate him, who pleased not himself, who went about doing good, and has expressed to us the very feelings of his heart, in that divine aphorism, which surpasses all the fine admired sayings of the philosophers, as much as the sun outshines a candle, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” The whole deportment of a Christian should show that the knowledge of Jesus, which he has received from the gospel, affords him all he could expect from it,—a balm for every grief, an amends for every loss, a motive for every duty, a restraint from every evil, a pattern for everything which he is called to do or suffer, and a principle sufficient to constitute the actions of every day, even in common life, acts of religion. He should (as the children of this world are wise to do in their generation) make every occurrence through which he passes subservient and subordinate to his main design. Gold is the worldly man’s god, and his worship and service are uniform and consistent, not by fits and starts, but from morning to night, from the beginning to the end of the year, he is the same man. He will not slip an opportunity of adding to his pelf¹ today, because he may have another tomorrow, but he heartily and eagerly embraces both; and so far as he carries his point, though his perseverance may expose him to the ridicule or reproach of his neighbours, he thinks himself well paid, and says,

Populus me sibilat; at mihi plaudo
Ipse domi, simul nummus contemtor in acra.²

[The public hiss at me, but I comfort myself
When in my own house, I contemplate the coins in my safe.]

I am, &c.

¹ [wealth.]

² [Horace. s. 1, 1, 66.]

LETTER V.

Jan. — 1776.

DEAR SIR,

I MAY learn, only I am a sad dunce, by small and common incidents, as well as by some more striking and important turns in life, that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. It is not for me to say, Today or tomorrow I will do this or that. I cannot write a letter to a friend without leave or without help, for neither opportunity nor ability are at my own disposal. It is not needful that the Lord should raise a mountain in my way to stop my purpose; if he only withdraw a certain kind of imperceptible support, which in general I have, and use without duly considering whose it is, then, in a moment, I feel myself unstrung and disabled, like a ship that has lost her masts, and cannot proceed till he is pleased to refit me and renew my strength. My pride and propensity to self-dependence render frequent changes of this kind necessary to me, or I should soon forget what I am, and sacrifice to my own drag. Therefore, upon the whole, I am satisfied, and see it best, that I should be absolutely poor and penniless in myself, and forced to depend upon the Lord for the smallest things as well as the greatest. And if, by his blessing, my experience should at length tally with my judgment in this point, that without him I can do nothing, then I know I shall find it easy, through him, to do all things, for the door of his mercy is always open, and it is but Ask and have. But, alas! a secret persuasion (though contrary to repeated convictions) that I have something at home, too often prevents me from going to him for it, and then no wonder I am disappointed. The life of faith seems so simple and easy in theory, that I can point it out to others in few words; but in practice it is very difficult, and my advances are so slow that I hardly dare say I get forward at all. It is a great thing indeed to have the spirit of a little child, so as to be habitually afraid of taking a single step without leading.

I have heard of you more than once since I heard from you, and am glad to know the Lord is still with you; I trust he has not withdrawn wholly from us. We have much call for thankfulness and much for humiliation. Some have been removed, some are evidently ripening for glory, and now and then we have a new inquirer. But the progress of wickedness amongst the unconverted here is awful. Convictions, repeatedly stifled in many, have issued in a hardness and boldness in sinning which I believe is seldom found but in those places where the light of the gospel has been long resisted and abused. If my eyes suitably affected my heart, I should weep day and night upon this account, but, alas! I am too indifferent. I feel a woeful defect in my zeal for God and compassion for souls; and when Satan and conscience charge me with cowardice, treachery, and stupidity, I know not what to reply. I am generally carried through my public work with some liberty; and, because I am

not put to shame before the people, I seem content and satisfied. I wish to be more thankful for what the Lord is pleased to do amongst us, but, at the same time, to be more earnest with him for a farther out-pouring of his Spirit. Assist me herein with your prayers.

As to my own private experience, the enemy is not suffered to touch the foundation of my faith and hope: thus far I have peace. But my conflicts and exercises with the effects of indwelling sin are very distressing. I cannot doubt of my state and acceptance, and yet it seems no one can have more cause for doubts and fears than myself, if such doublings were at all encouraged by the gospel: but I see they are not; I see that what I want and hope for, the Lord promises to do, for his own name's sake, and with a *non obstante* [notwithstanding] to all my vileness and perversion; and I cannot question but he has given me (for how else could I have it?) a thirst for that communion with him, in love and conformity to his image, of which, as yet, I have experienced but very faint and imperfect beginnings. But if he has begun, I venture, upon his word, that he will not forsake the work of his own hands.

On public affairs I say but little. Many are censuring men and measures, but I would lay all the blame upon sin. It appears plain to me that the Lord has a controversy with us, and therefore I fear what we have yet seen is but the beginning of sorrows. I am ready to dread the event of this summer; but I remember the Lord reigns. He has his own glory and the good of his church in view, and will not be disappointed. He knows how likewise to take care of those who fear him. I wish there was more sighing and mourning amongst professors, for the sins of the nation and the churches. But I must conclude, and,

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

DEAR SIR,

No very considerable alteration has taken place since I wrote, except the death of Mrs. L——, who was removed to a better world in September last. The latter part of her course was very painful; but the Lord made her more than conqueror, and she had good cause to apply the apostle's words, 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.³ She repeated that passage in her last illness, and chose it for her funeral text. She was a Christian indeed. Her faith was great, and so were her trials. Now she is above them all, now she is before the throne. The good Lord help us to be followers of those who, through faith and patience, have attained to the hope set before them.

The number of professors still increases with us, and a greater number of persons affords a greater variety of cases, and gives greater scope to observe the workings of the heart and Satan. For seven years I had to say, that I had not seen a person of whom I had conceived a good hope go back, but I have met with a few disappointments since. However, upon the whole, I trust the Lord is still with us. The enemy tries to disturb and defile us, and if the Lord did not keep the city, the poor watchman would wake in vain. But the eye that never slumbereth nor sleepeth has been upon us for good; and, though we have cause of humiliation and complaint, we have likewise much cause of thankfulness. My health is still preserved; and I hope that the Lord does not suffer my desires of personal communion with him, and of usefulness in the ministry, to decline. He supplies me with fresh strength and matter in my public work: I hear now and then of one brought to inquire the way; and his presence is at times made known to many in the ordinances.

To combine zeal with prudence is indeed difficult. There is often too much self in our zeal, and too much of the fear of man in our prudence. However, what we cannot attain by any skill or resolution of our own, we may hope in measure to receive from him who giveth liberally to those who seek him, and desire to serve him. Prudence is a word much abused, but there is a heavenly wisdom which the Lord has promised to give to those who humbly wait upon him for it. It does not consist in forming a bundle of rules and maxims, but in a spiritual taste and discernment, derived from an experimental knowledge of the truth, and of the heart of man as described in the word of God; and its exercise consists much in a simple dependence upon the Lord, to guide and prompt us in every action. We seldom act wrong when

³ "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

we truly depend upon him, and can cease from leaning to our own understanding. When the heart is thus in a right tune and frame, and his word dwells richly in us, there is a kind of immediate perception of what is proper for us to do in present circumstances, without much painful inquiry: a light shines before us upon the path of duty; and, if he permits us in such a spirit to make some mistakes, he will likewise teach us to profit by them, and our reflections upon what was wrong one day will make us to act more wisely the next. At the best we must always expect to meet with new proofs of our own weakness and insufficiency, otherwise how should we be kept humble, Or know how to prize the liberty he allows us of coming to the throne of grace for fresh forgiveness and direction every day? But if he enables us to walk before him with a single eye, he will graciously accept our desire of serving him better if we could, and his blessing will make our feeble endeavours in some degree successful, at the same time that we see defects and evils attending our best services, sufficient to make us ashamed of them.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

January 11, 1777.

DEAR SIR,

WE all need, and at the seasons the Lord sees best we all receive chastisement. I hope you likewise have reason to praise him, for supporting, sanctifying, and delivering mercy. The coward flesh presently shrinks under the rod, but faith need not fear it, for it is in the hand of one who loves us better than we do ourselves, and who knows our frame, that we are but dust, and therefore will not suffer us to be overdone and overwhelmed.

I feel as a friend should feel for Mr. B——; were I able I would soon send him health. If the Lord, who is able to remove his illness in a minute, permits it to continue, we may be sure, upon the whole, it will be better for him. It is, however, very lawful to pray that his health may be restored and his usefulness prolonged. I beg you to give my love to him, and tell him that my heart bears him an affectionate remembrance; and I know the God whom he serves will make every dispensation supportable and profitable to him.

If, as you observe, the Song of Solomon describes the experience of his church, it shows the dark as well as the bright side. No one part of it is the experience of every individual at any particular time. Some are in his banqueting-house, others upon their beds. Some sit under his banner, supported by his arm, while others have a faint perception of him at a distance, with many a hill and mountain between. In one thing, however, they all agree, that he is the leading object of their desires, and that they have had such a discovery of his person, work, and love, as makes him precious to their hearts. Their judgment of him is always the same, but their sensibility varies. The love they bear him, though rooted and grounded in their hearts, is not always equal in exercise, nor can it be so. We are like trees, which, though alive, cannot put forth their leaves and fruit without the influence of the sun. They are alive in winter as well as in summer; but how different is their appearance in these different seasons! Were we always alike, could we always believe, love, and rejoice, we should think the power inherent, and our own; but it is more for the Lord's glory, and more suited to form us to a temper becoming the gospel, that we should be made deeply sensible of our own inability and dependence, than that we should be always in a lively frame. I am persuaded a broken and a contrite spirit, a conviction of our vileness and nothingness, connected with a cordial acceptance of Jesus as revealed in the gospel, is the highest attainment we can reach in this life. Sensible comforts are desirable, and we must be sadly declined when they do not appear so to us; but I believe there may be a real exercise of faith and growth in grace, when our sensible feelings are faint and low. A soul may be in as thriving a state, when thirsting,

seeking, and mourning after the Lord, as when actually rejoicing in him, as much in earnest when fighting in the valley as when singing upon the mount; nay, dark seasons afford the surest and strongest manifestations of the power of faith. To hold fast the word of promise, to maintain a hatred of sin, to go on steadfastly in the path of duty, in defiance both of the frowns and the smiles of the world, when we have but little comfort, is a more certain evidence of grace than a thousand things which we may do or forbear when our spirits are warm and lively. I have seen many who have been upon the whole but uneven walkers, though at times they seemed to enjoy, at least have talked of great comforts. I have seen others, for the most part, complain of much darkness and coldness, who have been remarkably humble, tender, and exemplary in their spirit and conduct. Surely, were I to choose my lot, it should be with the latter.

I am, &c.