

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.———.

LETTER I.

June 29, 1757.

DEAR SIR,

I ENDEAVOUR to be mindful of you in my prayers, that you may find both satisfaction and success, and that the Lord himself may be your light, to discover to you every part of your duty. I would earnestly press you and myself to be followers of those who have been followers of Christ; to aim at a life of self-denial; to renounce self-will, and to guard against self-wisdom. The less we have to do with the world the better; and, even in conversing with our brethren, we have been, and unless we watch and pray, shall often be, ensnared. Time is precious, and opportunities once gone, are gone for ever. Even by reading, and what we call studying, we may be comparatively losers. The shorter way is to be closely waiting upon God in humble, secret, fervent prayer. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in his hands; and he gives bountifully, without upbraiding. On the other hand, whatever we may undertake with a sincere desire to promote his glory, we may comfortably pursue: nothing is trivial that is done for him. In this view, I would have you, at proper intervals, pursue your studies, especially at those times when you are unfit for better work. Pray for me, that I may be enabled to break through the snares of vanity that lie in my way; that I may be crucified with Christ, and live a hidden life by faith in him who loved me and gave himself for me.

Adieu.

LETTER II.

August 31, 1757.

DEAR SIR,

I WISH you much of that spirit which was in the apostle, which made him content to become all things to all men, that he might gain some. I am persuaded that love and humility are the highest attainments in the school of Christ, and the brightest evidences that he is indeed our master. If any should seem inclined to treat you with less regard, because you are or have been a Methodist teacher, you will find forbearance, meekness, and long-suffering, the most prevailing means to conquer their prejudices. Our Lord has not only taught us to expect persecution from the world, though this alone is a trial too hard for flesh and blood; but we must look for what is much more grievous to a renewed mind, to be in some respects slighted, censured, and misunderstood, even by our Christian brethren, and that, perhaps, in cases where we are really striving to promote the glory of God and the good of souls, and cannot, without the reproach of our consciences, alter our conduct, however glad we should be to have their approbation. Therefore, we are required, not only to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, but likewise to bear one another's burdens: which plainly intimates there will be something to be borne with on all hands; and happy indeed is he that is not offended. You may observe what unjust reports and surmises were received, even at Jerusalem, concerning the apostle Paul: and it seems he was condemned unheard, and that by many thousands too, Acts xxi. 20, 21: but we do not find that he was at all ruffled, or that he sought to retort any thing upon them, though doubtless, had he been so disposed, he might have found something to have charged them with in his turn; but he calmly and willingly complied with every thing in his power to soften and convince them. Let us be followers of this pattern, so far as he was a follower of Christ; for even Christ pleased not himself. How did he bear with the mistakes, weakness, intemperate zeal and imprudent proposals of his disciples, while on earth; and how does he bear with the same things from you and me, and every one of his followers now? and do we, can we, think much to bear with each other for his sake? Have we all a full remission of ten thousand talents, which we owed him, and were utterly unable to pay, and do we wrangle amongst ourselves for a few pence? God forbid!

If you should be numbered among the regular Independents, I advise you not to offend any of them by unnecessary singularities. I wish you not to part with any truth, or with any thing really expedient; but if the omitting any thing of an indifferent nature will obviate prejudices, and increase a mutual confidence, why should not so easy a sacrifice be made? Above all, my dear

friend, let us keep close to the Lord in a way of prayer: he giveth wisdom that is profitable to direct; he is the Wonderful Counsellor; there is no teacher like him. Why do the living seek to the dead? Why do we weary our friends and ourselves in running up and down, and turning over books for advice? If we shut our eyes upon the world and worldly things, and raise our thoughts upwards in humility and silence, should we not often hear the secret voice of the Spirit of God whispering to our hearts, and pointing out to us the way of truth and peace? Have we not often gone astray, and hurt either ourselves or our brethren, for want of attending to this divine instruction? Have we not sometimes mocked God, by pretending to ask direction from him, when we had fixed our determination before-hand! It is a great blessing to know that we are sincere; and next to this, to be convinced of our insincerity, and to pray against it.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

November 21, 1757.

DEAR SIR,

CAN you forgive so negligent a correspondent? I am indeed ashamed; but (if that is any good excuse) I use you no worse than my other friends. Whenever I write, I am obliged to begin with an apology; for, what with business and the incidental duties of every day, my time is always mortgaged before it comes into my hands, especially as I have so little skill in redeeming and improving it. I long to hear from you, and I long to see you; and indeed, from the terms of yours, I expected you here before this; which has been partly a cause of my delay. I have mislaid your letter, and cannot remember the particulars; in general, I remember you were well, and going on comfortably in your work; which was matter of joy to me; and my poor prayers are for you, that the Lord may own and prosper you more and more. The two great points we are called to pursue in this sinful divided world, are peace and holiness; I hope you are much in the study of them. These are the peculiar characteristics of a disciple of Jesus; they are the richest part of the enjoyments of heaven; and so far as they are received into the heart, they bring down heaven upon earth; and they are more inseparably connected between themselves than some of us are aware of. The longer I live, the more I see of the vanity and the sinfulness of our unchristian disputes; they eat up the very vitals of religion. I grieve to think how often I have lost my time and my temper that way, in presuming to regulate the vineyards of others, when I have neglected my own; when the beam in my own eye has so contracted my sight, that I could discern nothing but the mote in my neighbour's. I am now desirous to choose a better part. Could I speak the publican's word with a proper feeling, I wish not for the tongue of men or angels to fight about notions or sentiments. I allow that every branch of gospel-truth is precious, that errors are abounding, and that it is our duty to bear an honest testimony to what the Lord has enabled us to find comfort in, and to instruct with meekness such as are willing to be instructed; but I cannot see it my duty, nay, I believe it would be my sin, to attempt to beat my notions into other people's heads. Too often I have attempted it in time past; but now I judge, that both my zeal and my weapons were carnal. When our dear Lord questioned Peter, after his fall and recovery, he said not, Art thou wise, learned, and eloquent? Nay, he said not, Art thou clear, and sound, and orthodox? But this only, "Lovest thou me?" An answer to this was sufficient then, why not now? Any other answer, we may believe, would have been insufficient then. If Peter had made the most pompous confession of his faith and sentiments, still the first question would have recurred, "Lovest thou me?" This is a scripture

precedent. Happy the preacher, whoever he be, my heart and my prayers are with him, who can honestly and steadily appropriate Peter's answer. Such a man, I say, I am ready to hear, though he should be as much mistaken in some points as Peter afterwards appears to have been in others. What a pity is it, that Christians in succeeding ages should think the constraining force of the love of Christ too weak, and suppose the end better answered by forms, subscriptions, and questions of their own devising? I cannot acquit even those churches who judge themselves nearest the primitive rule in this respect: alas! will-worship and presumption may creep into the best external forms. But the misfortune both in churches and private Christians is, that we are too prone rather to compare ourselves with others, than to judge by the scriptures; and while each can see that they give not into the errors and mistakes of the opposite party, both are ready to conclude that they are right: and thus it happens, that an attachment to a supposed gospel-order will recommend a man sooner and farther to some churches, than an eminency of gospel-practice. I hope you will beware of such a spirit, whenever you publicly assume the Independent character: this, like a worm at the root, has nipped the graces, and hindered the usefulness, of many a valuable man; and those who change sides and opinions are the most liable to it. For the pride of our heart insensibly prompts us to cast about far and near for arguments to justify our own behaviour, and makes us too ready to hold the opinions we have taken up to the very extreme, that those amongst whom we are newly come may not suspect our sincerity. In a word, let us endeavour to keep close to God, to be much in prayer, to watch carefully over our hearts, and, leave the busy warm spirits to make the best of their work. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and that wait on him continually; to these he will show his covenant, not notionally, but experimentally. A few minutes of the Spirit's teaching will furnish us with more real useful knowledge, than toiling through whole folios of commentators and expositors. They are useful in their places and are not to be undervalued by those who can perhaps in general do better without them; but it will be our wisdom to deal less with the streams, and be more close in applying to the fountain-head. The scripture itself, and the Spirit of God, are the best and the only sufficient expositors of scripture. Whatever men have valuable in their writings, they got it from hence; and the way is as open to us as to any of them. There is nothing required but a teachable humble spirit; and learning, as it is commonly called, is not necessary in order to this. I commend you to the grace of God, and remain

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

Jan. 10, 1760.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE procured Cennick's sermons; they are, in my judgment, sound and sweet. O that you and I had a double portion of that spirit and unction which is in them. Come, let us not despair; the fountain is as full and as free as ever;—precious fountain, ever flowing with blood and water, milk and wine. This is the stream that heals the wounded, refreshes the weary, satisfies the hungry, strengthens the weak, and confirms the strong; it opens the eyes of the blind, softens the heart of stone, teaches the dumb to sing, and enables the lame and paralytic to walk, to leap, to run, to fly, to mount up with eagles wings: a taste of this stream raises earth to heaven, and brings down heaven upon earth. Nor is it a fountain only; it is a universal blessing, and assumes a variety of shapes to suit itself to our wants. It is a sun, a shield, a garment, a shade, a banner, a refuge: it is bread, the true bread, the very staff of life: it is life itself, immortal, eternal life!

The cross of Jesus Christ my Lord,
Is food and medicine, shield and sword.

Take that for your motto; wear it in your heart; keep it in your eye; have it often in your mouth till you can find something better. The cross of Christ is the tree of life and the tree of knowledge combined. Blessed be God, there is neither prohibition nor flaming sword to keep us back, but it stands like a tree by the highway-side, which affords its shade to every passenger without distinction. Watch and pray. We live in a sifting time: error gains ground every day. May the name and love of our Saviour Jesus keep us and all his people. Either write or come very soon to,

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

November 15, 1760.

DEAR SIR,

IF your visit should be delayed, let me have a letter. I want either good news or good advice; to hear that your soul prospers, or to receive something that may quicken my own. The apostle says, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ:” alas! we know how to say something about it, but how faint and feeble are our real perceptions of it! Our love to him is the proof and measure of what we know of his love to us. Surely then, we are mere children in this kind of knowledge, and every other kind is vain. What should we think of a man who should neglect his business, family, and all the comforts of life, that he might study the Chinese language; though he knows before-hand he should never be able to attain it, nor ever find occasion or opportunity to use it? The pursuit of every branch of knowledge that is not closely connected with the one thing needful, is no less ridiculous.

You know something of our friend Mrs. B——. She has been more than a month confined to her bed, and I believe her next remove will be to her coffin. The Lord has done great things for her. Though she has been a serious exemplary person all her life, when the prospect of death presented, she began to cry out earnestly, “What shall I do to be saved?” But her solicitude is at an end; she has seen the salvation of God, and now for the most part rejoices in something more than hope. This you will account good news, I am sure. Let it be your encouragement and mine. The Lord’s arm is not shortened, nor is his presence removed; he is near us still, though we perceive him not. May he guide you with his eye in all your public and private concerns, and may he in particular bless our communications to our mutual advantage.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

July 29, 1761.

DEAR SIR,

ARE the quarrels made up? Tell those who know what communion with Jesus is worth, that they will never be able to maintain it, if they give way to the workings of pride, jealousy, and anger. This will provoke the Lord to leave them dry, to command the clouds of his grace that they rain no rain upon them. These things are sure signs of a low frame, and a sure way to keep it so. Could they be prevailed upon, from a sense of the pardoning love of God to their own souls, to forgive each other, as the Lord forgives us, freely, fully, without condition and without reserve, they would find this like breaking down a stone-wall, which has hitherto shut up their prayers from the Lord's ears, and shut out his blessing from filling their hearts. Tell them, I hope to hear that all animosities, little and big, are buried, by mutual consent, in the Redeemer's grave. Alas! the people of God have enemies enough: Why, then, will they weaken their own hands? Why will they help their enemies to pull down the Lord's work? Why will they grieve those that wish them well, cause the weak to stumble, the wicked to rejoice, and bring a reproach upon their holy profession? Indeed, this is no light matter; I wish it may not lead them to something worse; I wish they may be wise in time, lest Satan gains further advantage over them, and draw them to something that shall make them (as David did) roar under the pains of broken bones. But I must break off. May God give you wisdom, faithfulness, and patience. Take care that you do not catch an angry spirit yourself, while you aim to suppress it in others; this will spoil all, and you will exhort, advise, and weep in vain. May you rather be an example and pattern to the flock; and in this view, be not surprised if you yourself meet some hard usage; rather rejoice that you will thereby have an opportunity to exemplify your own rules, and to convince your people, that what you recommend to them you do not speak by rote, but from the experience of your heart. One end why our Lord was tempted, was for the encouragement of his poor followers, that they might know him to be a High-Priest suited to them, having had a fellow-feeling in their distresses. For the like reason, he appoints his ministers to be sorely exercised, both from without and within, that they may sympathize with their flock, and know in their own hearts the deceitfulness of sin, the infirmities of the flesh, and the way in which the Lord supports and bears with all that trust him. Therefore be not discouraged; usefulness and trials, comforts and crosses, strength, and exercise, go together. But remember he has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee

a crown of life.” When you get to heaven, you will not complain of the way by which the Lord brought you. Farewell. Pray for us.

Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

Dec. 14, 1761.

DEAR SIR,

I PRAY the Lord to accompany you; but cannot help fearing you go on too fast. If you have not (as I am sure you ought not) made an absolute promise, but only conditional, you need not be so solicitous; depend upon it, when the Lord is pleased to remove you, he will send one to supply your place. I am grieved that your mind is so set upon a step, which, I fear, will occasion many inconveniencies to a people who have deserved your best regard. Others may speak you fairer, but none wishes you better than myself; therefore I hope you allow me to speak my mind plainly, and believe that it is no pleasure to me to oppose your inclinations. As to your saying they will take no denial, it has no weight with me. Had they asked what you were exceedingly averse to, you would soon have expressed yourself so as to convince them it was to no purpose to urge you; but they saw something in your manner or language that encouraged them; they saw the proposal was agreeable to you, that you were not at all unwilling to exchange your old friends for new ones; and this is the reason they would take no denial. If you should live to see those who are most forward in pressing you become the first to discourage you, you will think seriously of my words.

If I thought my advice would prevail, it should be this: Call the people together, and desire them, if possible, to forget you ever intended to depart from them; and promise not to think of a removal, till the Lord shall make your way so clear, that even they shall have nothing reasonable to object against it. You may keep your word with your other friends too; for when a proper person shall offer, as likely to please and satisfy the people as yourself, I will give my hearty consent to your removal.

Consider what it is you would have in your office, but maintenance, acceptance, and success. Have you not these where you are? Are you sure of having them where you are going? Are you sure the Spirit of God (without which you will do nothing) will be with you there, as he has been with you hitherto? Perhaps, if you act in your own spirit, you may find as great a change as Samson. I am ready to weep when I think what difficulties were surmounted to accomplish your ordination; and now, when the people thought themselves fixed, that you should so soon disappoint them.

Yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

February 15, 1762.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE been often thinking of you since your removal, and was glad to receive your letter today. I hope you will still go on to find more and more encouragement to believe, that the Lord has disposed and led you to the step you have taken. For though I wrote with the greatest plainness and earnestness, and would, if in my power, have prevented it while under deliberation, yet, now it is done and past recall, I would rather help than dishearten you. Indeed, I cannot say that my view of the affair is yet altered. The best way not to be cast down hereafter, is not to be too sanguine at first. You know there is something pleasing in novelty; as yet you are new to them, and they to you: I pray God, that you may find as cordial a regard from them as at present, when you have been with them as many years as in the place you came from. And if you have grace to be watchful and prayerful, all will be well; for we serve a gracious Master, who knows how to over-rule even our mistakes to his glory and our own advantage. Yet I observe, that when we do wrong, sooner or later we smart for our indiscretion, perhaps many years afterwards. After we have seen and confessed our fault, and received repeated proofs of pardoning love, as to the guilt, yet chastisement, to remind us more sensibly of our having done amiss, will generally find us out. So it was with David in the matter of Uriah; the Lord put away his sin, healed his broken bones, and restored unto him the light of his countenance; yet many troubles, in consequence of this affair, followed one upon another, till at length (many years afterwards) he was driven from Jerusalem by his own son. So it was with Jacob: he dealt deceitfully with his brother Esau; notwithstanding this the Lord appeared to him and blessed him, gave him comfortable promises, and revealed himself to him from time to time; yet after an interval of twenty years, his fault was brought afresh to his remembrance, and his heart trembled within him, when he heard his brother was coming with armed men to meet him. And thus I have found it in my own experience: things which I had forgotten a long while have been brought to my mind by providential dispensations which I little expected; but the first rise of which I have been able to trace far back, and forced to confess, that the Lord is indeed He that judgeth the heart and trieth the reins. I hint this for your caution; you know best upon what grounds you have proceeded; but if (though I do not affirm it, I hope otherwise), I say, if you have acted too much in your own spirit, been too hasty and precipitate; if you have not been sufficiently tender of your people, nor thoughtful of the consequences which your departure will probably involve them in; if you were impatient under the Lord's

hand, and, instead of waiting his time and way of removing the trials and difficulties you found, you have ventured upon an attempt to free and mend yourself; I say, if any of these things have mixed with your determinations, something will fall out to show you your fault: either you will not find the success you hope for, or friends will grow cold, or enemies and difficulties you dream not of, will present themselves; or your own mind will alter, so as what seems now most pleasant will afford you little pleasure. Yet, though I write thus, I do not mean, as I said before, to discourage you, but that you may be forewarned, humble, and watchful. If you should at any time have a different view of things, you may take comfort from the instances I have mentioned. The trials of David and Jacob were sharp, but they were short; and they proved to their advantage, put them upon acts of humiliation and prayer, and ended in a double blessing. Nothing can harm us that quickens our earnestness and frequency in applying to a throne of grace: only trust the Lord, and keep close to him, and all that befalls you shall be for good. Temptations end in victory; troubles prove an increase of consolation; yea, our very falls and failings tend to increase our spiritual wisdom, to give us a greater knowledge of Satan's devices, and make us more habitually upon our guard against them. Happy case of the believer in Jesus! when bitten by the fiery serpent he needs not go far for a remedy; he has only to look to a bleeding Saviour, and be healed.

I think one great advantage that attends a removal into a new place is, that it gives an easy opportunity of forming a new plan, and breaking off any little habits which we have found inconvenient, and yet, perhaps could not so readily lay aside, where our customs and acquaintance had been long formed. I earnestly recommend to you to reflect, if you cannot recollect some things which you have hitherto omitted, which may properly be now taken up; some things formerly allowed, which may now with ease and convenience be laid aside. I only give the hint in general; for I have nothing in particular to charge you with. I recommend to you to be very choice of your time, especially the fore part of the day. Let your morning hours be devoted to prayer, reading, and study; and suffer not the importunity of friends to rob you of the hours before noon, without a just necessity: and if you accustom yourself to rise early in the morning, you will find a great advantage. Be careful to avoid losing your thoughts, whether in books or otherwise, upon any subjects which are not of a direct subserviency to your great design, till towards dinner-time. The afternoon is not so favourable to study: this is a proper time for paying and receiving visits, conversing among your friends, or unbending with a book of instructive entertainment, such as history, &c. which may increase your general knowledge, without a great confinement of your attention; but let the morning-hours be sacred. I think you would

likewise find advantage in using your pen more. Write short notes upon the scriptures you read, or transcribe the labours of others; make extracts from your favourite authors, especially those who, besides a fund of spiritual and evangelical matter, have a happy talent of expressing their thoughts in a clear and lively, or pathetic manner. You would find a continued exercise in this way would be greatly useful to form your own style, and help your delivery and memory; you would become insensibly master of their thoughts, and find it more easy to express yourself justly and clearly: what we read we easily lose, but what we commit to paper is not so soon forgot. Especially remember (what you well know, but we cannot too often remind each other), that frequent secret prayer is the life of all we do. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given; but all our diligence will fail, if we are remiss in this particular. I am glad it is not thought necessary for you to go to London on this occasion. I hope you will not think it necessary upon any other account. Rather keep close to the work you have undertaken, and endeavour to avoid any thing that looks like ostentation, or a desire to be taken notice of. You see I advise you with the freedom of a friend who loves you, and longs to see your work and your soul prosper.

You will, I doubt not, endeavour to promote the practice of frequent prayer in the houses that receive you. I look upon prayer meetings as the most profitable exercises (excepting the public preaching) in which Christians can engage: they have a direct tendency to kill a wordly, trifling spirit, to draw down a divine blessing upon all our concerns, compose differences, and enkindle (at least to maintain) the flame of divine love amongst brethren. But I need not tell you the advantages; you know them: I only would exhort you, and the rather as I find in my own case the principal cause of my leanness and unfruitfulness is owing to an unaccountable backwardness to pray. I can write, or read, or converse, or hear, with a ready will; but prayer is more spiritual and inward than any of these, and the more spiritual any duty is the more my carnal heart is apt to start from it. May the Lord pour forth his precious spirit of prayer and supplication in both our hearts!

I am not well pleased with the account you give of so many dry bones. It increases my wonder, that you could so readily exchange so much plump flesh and blood as you had about you for a parcel of skeletons. I wish they may not haunt you and disturb your peace. I wish these same dry bones do not prove thorns in your sides and in your eyes. You say, now you have to pray, and prophecy, and wait for the four winds to come and put life into these bones. God grant that your prayers may be answered: but if I knew a man who possessed a field in a tolerable soil, which had afforded him some increase every year, and if this man, after having bestowed seven years labour in cultivating, weeding, manuring, fencing, &c., just when he has

brought his ground (in his neighbour's judgment) into good order, and might reasonably hope for larger crops than he had ever yet seen, should suddenly forego all his advantages, leave his good seed for the birds to eat, pull up the young fences which cost him so much pains to plant, and all this for the sake of making a new experiment upon the top of a mountain; though I might heartily wish him great success I could not honestly give him great encouragement. You have parted with that for a trifle which in my eyes seems an inestimable jewel, I mean the hearts and affections of an enlightened people. This appears to me one of the greatest honours and greatest pleasures a faithful minister can possess, and which many faithful and eminent ministers have never been able to obtain. This gave you a vast advantage; your gift was more acceptable there than that of any other person, and more than you will probably find elsewhere. For I cannot make a comparison between the hasty approbation of a few, whose eyes are but beginning to open, and their affections and passions warm, so that they must, if possible, have the man that first catches their attention: I say, I cannot think this worthy to be compared to the regard of a people who understood the gospel, were able to judge of men and doctrines, and had trial of you for so many years. It is, indeed, much to your honour (it proves that you were faithful, diligent, and exemplary), that the people proved so attached to you; but that you should force yourself from them, when they so dearly loved you, and so much needed you, this has made all your friends in these parts to wonder, and your enemies to rejoice; and I, alas! know not what to answer in your behalf to either. Say not, "I hate this Micaiah, for he prophesies not good of me, but evil," but allow me the privilege of a friend. My heart is full when I think what has happened, and what will probably be the consequence. In a few words, I am strongly persuaded you have taken an unadvised step, and would therefore prepare you for the inconvenience and uneasiness you may probably meet with. And if I am (as I desire I may prove) mistaken, my advice will do no harm; you will want something to balance the caresses and success you meet with.

We should be very glad to see you, and hope you will take your measures, when you do come, to lengthen your usual stay, in proportion to the difference of the distance. Pray for us.

I am, &c.