

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.

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LETTER X.

DEAR SIR,

MY connections with sea affairs have often led me to think, that the varieties observable in christian experience may be properly illustrated from the circumstances of a voyage. Imagine to yourself a number of vessels, at different times, and from different places, bound to the same port; there are some things in which all these would agree,—the compass steered by, the port in view, the general rules of navigation, both as to the management of the vessel and determining their astronomical observations, would be the same in all. In other respects they would differ; perhaps no two of them would meet with the same distribution of winds and weather. Some we see set out with a prosperous gale; and, when they almost think their passage secured, they are checked by adverse blasts; and, after enduring much hardship and danger, and frequent expectations of shipwreck, they just escape and reach the desired haven. Others meet the greatest difficulties at first; they put forth in a storm, and are often beaten back; at length their voyage proves favourable, and they enter the port with a *πλεροφορία*, a rich and abundant entrance. Some are hard beset with cruisers and enemies, and obliged to fight their way through; others meet with little remarkable in their passage. Is it not thus in the spiritual life? All true believers walk by the same rule, and mind the same things. The word of God is their compass; Jesus is both their polar star and their sun of righteousness; their hearts and faces are all set Sion-ward. Thus far they are as one body, animated by one spirit; yet their experience, formed upon these common principles, is far from being uniform. The Lord, in his first call, and his following dispensations, has a regard to the situation, temper, and talents of each, and to the particular services or trials he has appointed them for. Though all are exercised at times, yet some pass through the voyage of life much more smoothly than others. But he “who walketh upon the wings of the wind, and measures the waters in the hollow of his hand,” will not suffer any, of whom he has taken charge, to perish in the storms, though, for a season, perhaps, many of them are ready to give up all hopes.

We must not, therefore, make the experience of others, in all respects, a rule to our-selves, nor our own, a rule to others; yet, these are common mistakes, and productive of many more. As to myself, every part of my case has been extraordinary. I have hardly met a single instance resembling it. Few, very few, have been recovered from such a dreadful state; and the few that have been thus favoured, have generally passed through the most severe convictions; and after the Lord has given them peace, their future lives have been usually more zealous, bright, and exemplary, than common. Now, as on the one hand, my convictions were very moderate, and far below what might have been expected from the dreadful review I had to make; so, on the other, my first beginnings in a religious course were as faint as can be well imagined. I never knew that season alluded to, Jer. ii. 2. Rev. ii. 4. usually called the time of the first love. Who would not expect to hear, that, after such a wonderful unhoped-for deliverance, as I had received, and, after my eyes were in some measure enlightened to see things aright, I should immediately cleave to the Lord and his ways, with full purpose of heart, and consult no more with flesh and blood? But, alas! it was far otherwise with me: I had learned to pray; I set some value upon the word of God, and was no longer a libertine; but my soul

still cleaved to the dust. Soon after my departure from L-, I began to intermit, and grow slack in waiting upon the Lord; I grew vain and trifling in my conversation; and though my heart smote me often, yet my armour was gone, and I declined fast; and by the time I arrived at Guinea, I seemed to have forgotten all the Lord's mercies. and my own engagements, and was (profaneness excepted) almost as bad as before. The enemy prepared a train of temptations, and I became his easy prey; and, for about a month, he lulled me asleep in a course of evil, of which, a few months before, I could not have supposed myself any longer capable. How much propriety is there in the apostle's advice, "Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." O, who can be sufficiently upon their guard? Sin first deceives, and then it hardens. I was now fast bound in chains; I had little desire, and no power at all to recover myself. I could not but at times reflect how it was with me: but, if I attempted to struggle with it, it was in vain. I was just like Samson, when he said, "I will go forth and shake my-self as at other times;" but the Lord was departed, and he found himself helpless in the hands of his enemies. By the remembrance of this interval, the Lord has often instructed me since, what a poor creature I am in my-self, incapable of standing a single hour without continual fresh supplies of strength and grace from the fountain head.

At length the Lord, whose mercies are infinite, interposed in my behalf. My business in this voyage, while upon the coast, was to sail from place to place in the long-boat to purchase slaves. The ship was at Sierra Leone, and I then at the Plantames, the scene of my former captivity, where every thing I saw might seem to remind me of my ingratitude. I was in easy circumstances, courted by those who formerly despised me. The lime trees I had planted were grown tall, and promised fruit the following year; against which time I had expectations of returning with a ship of my own, But none of these things affected me, till, as I have said, the Lord again inter-posed to save me. He visited me with a violent fever, which broke the fatal chain, and once more brought me to myself. But, O what a prospect! I thought myself now summoned away. My past dangers and deliverances, my earnest prayers in the time of trouble, my solemn vows before the Lord at his table, and my ungrateful returns for all his goodness were all present to my mind at once. Then I began to wish that the Lord had suffered me to sink into the ocean, when I first besought his mercy. For a little while I concluded the door of hope to be quite shut; but this continued not long. Weak, and almost delirious, I arose from my bed, and crept to a retired part of the island; and here I found a renewed liberty to pray. I durst make no more resolves, but cast myself before the Lord, to do with me as he should please. I do not remember that any particular text, or re-remarkable discovery, was presented to my mind; but in general I was enabled to hope and believe in a crucified Saviour. The burden was removed from my conscience xxx not only my peace, but my health was restored; I cannot say instantaneously, but I recovered from that hour; and so fast, that when I returned to the ship, two days afterwards, I was perfectly well before I got on board. And from that time, I trust, I have been delivered from the power and dominion of sin; though, as to the effects and conflicts of sin dwelling in me, I still "groan, being burdened." I now began again to wait upon the Lord; and though I have often grieved his Spirit, and foolishly wandered from him since, (when, alas shall I be more wise?) yet his powerful grace has hitherto preserved me from such black declensions as this I have last

recorded; and I humbly trust in his mercy and promises, that he will be my guide and guard to the end.

My leisure hours in this voyage were chiefly employed in learning the Latin language, which I had now entirely forgot. This desire took place from an imitation I had seen of one of Horace's odes in a magazine. I began the attempt under the greatest disadvantages possible; for I pitched upon a poet, perhaps the most difficult of the poets, even Horace him-self, for my first book. I had picked up an old English translation of him, which, with Castalio's Latin Bible, were all my helps. I forgot a Dictionary; but I would not therefore give up my purpose. I had the edition in, usum Delphini, and by comparing the Odes with the interpretation, and tracing the words, I could understand from one place to another, by the index, with the assistance I could get from the Latin Bible; in this way, by dint of hard industry, often waking when I might have slept, I made some progress before I returned, and not only understood the sense and meaning of many Odes, and some of the Epistles, but began to relish the beauties of the composition, and acquire a spice of what Mr. Law calls classical enthusiasm. And, indeed, by this means, I had Horace more ad unguent than some who are masters of the Latin tongue; for my helps were so few, that I generally had the passage fixed in my memory, before I could fully understand its meaning.

My business in the longboat, during the eight months we were upon the coast, exposed me to innumerable dangers and perils, from burning suns, and chilling dews, winds, rains, and thunder-storms, in the open boat; and on shore, from long journeys through the woods, and the temper of the natives, who are, in many places, cruel, treacherous, and watching opportunities for mischief. Several boats in the same time were cut off; several white men poisoned, and, in my own boat, I buried six or seven people with fevers. When going on shore, or returning from it, in their little canoes, I have been more than once or twice upset by the violence of the surf, or break of the sea, and brought to land half dead (for I could not swim). An account of such escapes as I still remember, would swell to several sheets, and many more I have perhaps forgot; I shall only select one instance, as a specimen of that wonderful providence which watched over me for good, and which, I doubt not, you will think worthy of notice.

When our trade was finished, and we were near sailing to the West Indies, the only remaining service I had to perform in the boat, was to assist in bringing the wood and water from the shore. We were then at Rio Cestors. I used to go into the river in the after-noon, with the sea breeze, procure my loading in the evening, and return on board in the morning, with the land wind. Several of these little voyages I had made; but the boat was grown old, and almost unfit for use. This service likewise was almost completed. One day, having dined on board, I was preparing to return to the river, as formerly; I had taken leave of the captain, received his orders, was ready in the boat, and just going to put off, as we term it; that is, to let go our ropes, and sail from the ship. In that instant, the captain came up from the cabin, and called me on board again. I went, expecting further orders; but he said he had "taken it in his head" (as he phrased it), that I should remain that day in the ship, and accordingly ordered another man to go in my room. I was surprised at this, as the boat had never been sent away without me before; and asked him the reason. He could give me no reason, but as above, that so he would have it.

Accordingly, the boat went without me, but returned no more. She sunk that night in the river, and the person who had supplied my place was drowned. I was much struck when we received news of the event the next morning. The captain himself, though quite a stranger to religion, so far as to deny a particular providence, could not help being affected; but he declared, that he had no other reason for countermanding me at that time, but that it came suddenly into his mind to detain me. I wonder I omitted this in my eight letters, as I have always thought it one of the most extraordinary circumstances of my life.

I am, dear Sir,
Your humble servant.

January, 21, 1763.