

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
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LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

CONTAINING
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED
MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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LETTER XIII.

DEAR SIR,

MY third voyage was shorter and less perplexed than either of the former. Before I sailed, I met with a young man, who had formerly been a midshipman and my intimate corn-pardon, on board the Harwich. He was, at the time I first knew him, a sober youth, but I found too much success in my unhappy attempts to infect him with libertine principles. When we met at L , our acquaintance renewed upon the ground of our former intimacy. He had good sense, and had read many books. Our conversation frequently turned upon religion, and I was desirous to repair the mischief I had done him. I gave him a plain account of the manner and reason of my change, and used every argument to persuade him to relinquish his infidel schemes; and when I sometimes pressed him so close, that he had no other reply to make, he would remind me that I was the very first person who had given him an idea of his liberty. This occasioned me many mournful reflections. He was then going master to Guinea himself, but before his ship was ready, his merchant became a bankrupt, which disconcerted his voyage. As he had no further expectations for that year, I offered to take him with me as a companion, that he might gain a knowledge of the coast; and the gentleman who employed me promised to provide for him upon his return. My view in this was not so much to serve him in his business, as to have opportunity of debating the point with him at leisure; and I hoped, in the course of my voyage, my arguments, example, and prayers, might have some good effect on him. My intention in this step was better than my judgment, and I had frequent reason to repent it. He was exceedingly profane, and grew worse and worse: I saw in him a most lively picture of what I had once been, but it was very in-convenient to have it always before my eyes. Besides, he was not only deaf to my remonstrances himself, but laboured all that he could to counteract my influence upon others. His spirit and passions were likewise exceeding high, so that it required all my prudence and authority to hold him in any degree of restraint. He was as a sharp thorn in my side for some time; but at length I had an opportunity upon the coast of buying it small vessel, which I supplied with a cargo from my own, and gave him the command, and sent him away to trade on the ship's account. When we parted, I repeated and enforced my best advice. I believe his friendship and regard were as great as could be expected, where principles were so diametrically opposite. He seemed greatly affected when I left him, but my words had no weight with him. When he found himself at liberty from under my eye, he gave a hasty loose to every appetite; and ' his violent irregularities, joined to the heat of the climate, soon threw him into a malignant fever, which carried him off in a few days. He died convinced, but not changed. The account I had from those who were with him was dreadful; his rage and despair struck them all with horror, and he pronounced his own fatal doom before he expired, without any appearance that he either hoped or asked for mercy. I thought this awful contrast might not be improper to give you, as a stronger view of the distinguishing goodness of God to me, the chief of sinners.

I left the coast in about four months, and sailed for St. Christopher's. Hitherto I had enjoyed a perfect state of health, equally in every climate, for several years; but, upon this passage, I was visited with a fever, which gave me a very near prospect of eternity. I have obtained liberty to inclose you three

or four letters, which will more clearly illustrate the state and measure of my experience, at different times, than any thing I can say at present. One of them you will find was writ-ten at this period, when I could hardly hold a pen, and had some reason to believe I should write no more. I had not that “*full assurance*”, which is so desirable at a time when flesh and heart fail; but my hopes were greater than my fears, and I felt a silent composure of spirit, which enabled me to wait the event without much anxiety. My trust, though weak in degree, was alone fixed upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus; and those words, “he is able to save to the uttermost,” gave me great relief. I was for a while troubled with a very singular thought. Whether it was a temptation, or that the fever disordered my faculties, I cannot say, but I seemed not so much afraid of wrath and punishment, as of being lost and overlooked amidst the myriads that are continually entering the unseen world. What is my soul, thought I, among such an innumerable multitude of beings? And this troubled me greatly. Perhaps the Lord will take no notice of me. I was perplexed thus for some time, but at last a text of scripture, very apposite to the case, occurred to my mind, and put an end to the doubt: “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” In about ten days, beyond the hopes of those about me, I began to amend, and by the time of our arrival in the West Indies, I was perfectly recovered.—I hope this visitation was made useful to me.

Thus far, that is, for about the space of six years, the Lord was pleased to lead me in a secret way. I had learned something of the evil of my heart; I had read the Bible over and over, with several good books, and had a general view of gospel truths. But my conceptions were, in many respects, confused; not having, in all this time, met with one acquaintance who could assist my inquiries. But upon my arrival at St. Christopher’s, this voyage, I found a captain of a ship from Lon-don, whose conversation was greatly helpful to me. He was, and is a member of Mr. B——r’s church, a man of experience in the things of God, and of a lively, communicative turn. We discovered each other by some casual expressions in mixed company, and soon became (so far as business would permit) in-separable. For near a month, we spent every evening together, on hoard each other’s ship alternately, and often prolonged our visits till towards day-break. I was all ears; and what was better, he not only informed my under-standing, but his discourse inflamed my heart. He encouraged me to open my mouth in social prayer; he taught me the advantage of christian converse; he put me upon an attempt to make my profession more public, and to venture to speak for God. From him, or rather from the Lord, by his means, I received an increase of knowledge; my conceptions became clearer and more evangelical, and I was delivered from a fear which had long troubled me, the fear of relapsing into my former apostacy. But now I began to understand the security of the covenant of grace, and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God, through faith in an unchangeable Saviour. He likewise gave me a general view of the state of religion, with the errors and controversies of the times (things to which I had been entirely a stranger), and finally directed me where to apply in London for further instruction. With these newly acquired advantages, I left him, and my passage homewards gave me leisure to digest what I had received. I had much comfort and freedom during those seven weeks, and my sun was seldom clouded. I arrived safe in L—— August, 1754.

My stay at home was intended to be but short, and by the beginning of November, I was again ready for the sea: but the Lord saw fit to over-rule my design. During the time I was engaged in the slave trade, I never had the least scruple as to its lawfulness. I was, upon the whole, satisfied with it, as the appointment Providence had marked out for me; yet it was, in many respects, far from eligible. It is, indeed, accounted a genteel employment, and is usually very profitable, though to me it did not prove so, the Lord seeing that a large increase of wealth could not be good for me. However, I considered myself as a sort of gaoler or turnkey; and I was sometimes shocked with an employment that was perpetually conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles. In this view I had often petitioned, in my prayers, that the Lord, in his own time, would be pleased to fix mine a more humane calling, and, if it might be, place me where I might have more frequent converse with his people and ordinances, and be freed from those long separations from home, which very often were hard to bear. My prayers were now answered, though in a way I little expected. I now experienced another sudden, unforeseen change of life. I was within two days of sailing, and, to all appearance in good health as usual; but in the after. noon, as I was sitting with Mrs. N*****, by ourselves, drinking tea, and talking over past events, I was in a moment seized with a fit, which deprived me of sense and motion, and left me no other sign of life than that of breathing. I suppose it was of the apoplectic kind. It lasted about an hour, and when I recovered, it left a pain and dizziness in my head, which continued with such symptoms, as induced the physicians to judge it would not be safe or prudent for me to proceed on the voyage. Accordingly, by the advice of my friend, to whom the ship belonged, I re-signed the command the day before she sailed; and thus I was unexpectedly called from that service, and freed from a share of the future consequences of that voyage, which proved extremely calamitous. The person who went in my room, most of the officers, and many of the crew, died, and the vessel was brought home with great difficulty.

As I was now disengaged from business, I left L——, and spent most of the following year at London, and in Kept. But I entered upon a new trial. You will easily conceive that Mrs. N***** was not an unconcerned spectator, when I lay extended, and, as she thought, expiring upon the ground. In effect, the blow that struck me reached her in the same instant: she did not, indeed, immediately feel it, till her apprehensions on my account began to subside; but as I grew better, she became worse: her surprise threw her into a disorder, which no physicians could define, or medicines remove. Without any of the ordinary symptoms of a consumption, she decay ed almost visibly, till she became so weak that she could hardly bear any one to walk across the room she was in. I was placed for about eleven months in what Dr. Young calls the dreadful post of observation, Darker every hour.”

It was not till after any settlement in my present station, that the Lord was pleased to restore her by his own hand, when all hopes from ordinary means were at an end. But before this took place, I have some other particulars to mention, which must be the subject of the following sheet, which I hope will be the last on this subject, from

Your affectionate servant.

February 1, 1764.