

THE
WORKS
OF
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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.

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LETTER II.

REVEREND SIR,

I CAN sometimes feel a pleasure in repeating the grateful acknowledgment of David, "O Lord, I am thy servant, the son of thine handmaid; thou hast loosed my bands." The tender mercies of God towards me were manifest in the first moment of my life;—I was born as it were in his house, and dedicated to him in my infancy. My mother (as I have heard from many) was a pious experienced Christian; she was a dissenter, in communion with the late Dr. Jennings. I was her only child, and as she was of a weak constitution and a retired temper, almost her whole employment was the care of my education. I have some faint remembrance of her care and instructions. At a time when I could not be more than three years of age, she herself taught me English, and with so much success (as I had something of a forward turn), that when I was four years old I could read with propriety, in any common book that offered. She stored my memory, which was then very retentive, with many valuable pieces, chapters, and portions of scripture, catechisms, hymns, and poems. My temper, at that time, seemed quite suitable to her wishes: I had little inclination to the noisy sports of children, but was best pleased when in her company, and always as willing to learn as she was to teach me. How far the best education may fall short of reaching the heart, will strongly appear in the sequel of my history: yet, I think, for the encouragement of pious parents to go on in the good way of doing their part faithfully to form their children's minds, I may properly propose myself as an instance. Though in process of time, I sinned away all the advantages of these early impressions, yet they were for a great while a restraint upon me; they returned again and again, and it was very long before I could wholly shake them off and when the Lord at length opened my eyes, I found a great benefit from the recollection of them. Further, my dear mother, besides the pains she took with me, often commended me with many prayers and tears to God; and I doubt not but I reap the fruits of these prayers to this hour.

My mother observed my early progress with peculiar pleasure, and intended from the first to bring me up with a view to the ministry, if the Lord should so incline my heart. In my sixth year I began to learn Latin; but, before I had time to know much about it, the intended plan of my education was broke short.—The Lord's designs were far beyond the views of an earthly parent; he was pleased to reserve me for an unusual proof of his patience, providence, and grace, and therefore overruled the purpose of my friends, by depriving me of this excellent parent, when I was something under seven years old. I was born the 24th of July, 1725, and she died the 11th of that month, 1732.

My father was then at sea (he was a commander in the Mediterranean trade at that time): he came home the following year, and soon after married again. Thus I passed into different hands. I was well treated in all other respects; but the loss of my mother's instructions was not repaired. I was now permitted to mingle with careless and profane children, and soon began to learn their ways. Soon after my father's marriage, I was sent to a boarding school in Essex, where the imprudent severity of the master almost broke my spirit and relish for books. With him I forgot the first principles and rules of arithmetic, which my mother had taught me years before. I stayed there two years; in the last of

the two a new usher coming, who observed and studied my temper, I took to the Latin with great eagerness; so that before I was ten years old, I reached and maintained the first post in the second class, which in that school read Tully and Virgil. I believe I was pushed forward too fast, and therefore not being grounded, I soon lost all I had learned (for I left school in my tenth year), and when I long afterwards undertook the Latin language from books, I think I had little, if any advantage, from what I had learned before.

My father's second marriage was from a family in Essex; and when I was eleven years old, he took me with him to sea. He was a man of remarkable good sense, and great knowledge of the world; he took great care of my morals, but could not supply my mother's part. Having been educated himself in Spain, he always observed an air of distance and severity in his carriage, which overawed and discouraged my spirit. I was always in fear when before him, and therefore he had the less influence. From that time to the year 1742, I made several voyages, but with considerable intervals between, which were chiefly spent in the country, excepting a few months in my fifteenth year, when I was placed upon a very advantageous prospect at Alicant in Spain; but my unsettled behaviour and impatience of restraint rendered that design abortive.

In this period my temper and conduct were exceedingly various. At school, or soon after, I had little concern about religion, and easily received very ill impressions. But I was often disturbed with convictions; I was fond of reading from a child; among other books, Rennet's Christian Oratory often came in my way; and though I understood but little of it, the course of life therein recommended appeared very desirable, and I was inclined to attempt it. I began to pray, to read the scriptures, and to keep a sort of diary; I was presently religious in my own eyes; but, alas! this seeming goodness had no solid foundation, but passed away like a morning cloud, or early dew. I was soon weary, gradually gave it up, and became worse than before: instead of prayer, I learned to curse and blaspheme, and was exceedingly wicked, when from under my parent's view. All this was before I was twelve years old. About that time I had a dangerous fall from a horse; I was thrown, I believe, within a few inches of a hedge-row newly cut down; I got no hurt; but could not avoid taking notice of a gracious providence in my deliverance; for had I fallen upon the stakes, I had inevitably been killed; my conscience suggested to me the dreadful consequences, if in such a state I had been summoned to appear before God. I presently broke off from my profane practices, and appeared quite altered; but was not long before I declined again. These struggles between sin and conscience were often repeated; but the consequence was, that every relapse sunk me into still greater depths of wickedness. I was once roused by the loss of an intimate companion. We had agreed to go on board a man-of-war (I think it was on a Sunday), but I providentially came too late; the boat was upset, and he and several others were drowned. I was invited to the funeral of my play-fellow, and was exceedingly affected, to think that by a delay of a few minutes (which had much displeased and angered me till I saw the event), my life had been preserved. However, this likewise was soon forgot. At another time, the perusal of the Family Instructor put me upon a partial and transient reformation. In brief, though I cannot distinctly relate particulars, I think, I took up and laid aside a religious profession three or four different times

before I was sixteen years of age; but all this while my heart was insincere. I often saw a necessity of religion as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it. Instances of this, I can remember, were frequent in the midst of all my forms; I was so strangely blind and stupid, that sometimes when I have been determined upon things, which I knew were sinful and contrary to my duty, I could not go on quietly, till I had first dispatched my ordinary task of prayer, in which I have grudged every moment of my time; and when this was finished, my conscience was in some measure pacified, and I could rush into folly with little remorse.

My last reform was the most remarkable both for degree and continuance. Of this period, at least of some part of it, I may say, in the apostle's words, "After the strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee." I did every thing that might be expected from a person entirely ignorant of God's righteousness, and desirous to establish his own. I spent the greatest part of every day in reading the scriptures, meditation, and prayer; I fasted often; I even abstained from all animal food for three months; I would hardly answer a question, for fear of speaking an idle word. I seemed to bemoan my former miscarriages very earnestly, sometimes with tears. In short, I became an ascetic, and endeavoured, so far as my situation would permit, to renounce society, that I might avoid temptation. I continued in this serious mood (I cannot give it a higher title) for more than two years, without any considerable breaking off. But it was a poor religion; it left me in many respects under the power of sin, and so far as it prevailed, only tended to make me gloomy, stupid, unsociable, and useless.

Such was the frame of my mind, when I became acquainted with Lord Shaftesbury. I saw the second volume of his *Characteristics* in a petty shop at Middleburgh in Holland. The title allured me to buy it, and the style and manner gave me great pleasure in reading, especially the second piece, which his lordship, with great propriety, has entitled, a *Rhapsody*. Nothing could be more suited to the romantic turn of my mind, than the address of this pompous declamation; of the design and tendency I was not aware; I thought the author a most religious person, and that I had only to follow him, and be happy. Thus, with fine words and fair speeches, my simple heart was beguiled. This book was always in my hand; I read it, till I could very nearly repeat the *Rhapsody* verbatim from beginning to end. No immediate effect followed, but it operated like a slow poison, and prepared the way for all that followed.

This letter brings my history down to December, 1742. I was then lately returned from a voyage, and my father, not intending for the sea again, was thinking how to settle me in the world; but I had little life or spirit for business: I knew but little of men or things. I was fond of a visionary scheme of contemplative life; a medley of religion, philosophy, and indolence; and was quite averse to the thoughts of an industrious application to business. At length a merchant in Liverpool, an intimate friend of my father (to whom, as the instrument of God's goodness, I have since been chiefly indebted for all my earthly comforts), proposed to send me for some years to Jamaica, and to charge himself with the care of my future fortune. I consented to this, and everything was prepared for my voyage. I was upon the point of setting out the following week. In the meantime, my father sent me on some business to a place a few miles beyond Maidstone in Kent; and this little journey, which was to have been only for three or four days, occasioned a sudden and

remarkable turn, which roused me from the habitual indolence I had contracted, and gave rise to the series of uncommon dispensations, of which you desire a more particular account. So true it is, "that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

I am affectionately
Your's in the best bonds.
January 13, 1763.

