

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 IV.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH I desired your instructions as to the manner and extent of these memoirs, I began to write before I received them, and had almost finished the preceding sheet when your favour of the eleventh came to hand. I shall find another occasion to acknowledge my sense of your kind expressions of friendship, which, I pray the Lord, I may never give you cause to repent or withdraw; at present I shall confine myself to what more particularly relates to the task assigned us. I shall obey you, Sir, in taking notice of the little incidents you recall to my memory, and of others of the like nature, which, without your direction, I should have thought too trivial, and too much my own to deserve mentioning. When I began the eighth letter, I intended to say no more of myself than might be necessary to illustrate the wonders of divine providence and grace in the leading turns of my life; but I account your judgment a sufficient warrant for enlarging my plan.

Amongst other things, you desired a more explicit account of the state and progress of my courtship, as it is usually phrased. This was the point in which I thought it especially became me to be very brief; but I submit to you; and this seems a proper place to resume it, by telling you how it stood at the time of my leaving England.—When my inclinations first discovered themselves, both parties were so young, that no one but myself considered it in a serious view. It served for tea-table talk amongst our friends, and nothing further was expected from it. But afterwards, when my passion seemed to have abiding effects, so that in an interval of two years it was not at all abated, and especially as it occasioned me to act without any regard to prudence or interest, or my father's designs, and as there was a coolness between him and the family, her parents began to consider it as a matter of consequence; and when I took my last leave of them, her mother (at the same time she expressed the most tender affection for me, as if I had been her own child) told me, that though she had no objections to make, upon a supposition that, at a maturer age, there should be a probability of our engaging upon a prudent prospect, yet, as things then stood, she thought herself obliged to interfere; and therefore desired I would no more think of returning to their house, unless her daughter was from home, till such time as I could either prevail with myself entirely to give up my pretensions, or could assure her that I had my father's express consent to go on. Much depended upon Mrs. N*****'s part in this affair; it was something difficult; but though she was young, gay, and quite unpractised in such matters, she was directed to a happy medium. A positive encouragement, or an absolute refusal, would have been attended with equal, though different disadvantages. But without much studying about it, I found her always upon her guard: she had penetration to see her absolute power over me, and prudence to make a proper use of it; she would neither understand my hints, nor give me room to come to a direct explanation. She has said since, that from the first discovery of my regard, and long before the thought was agreeable to her, she had often an unaccountable impression upon her mind, that sooner or later she should be mine. Upon these terms we parted.

I now return to my voyage. During our passage to Madeira, I was a prey to the most gloomy thoughts. Though I had well deserved all I met with, and the captain might have been justified if he had carried his resentment still farther;

yet my pride at that time suggested that I had been grossly injured, and this so far wrought upon my wicked heart, that I actually formed designs against his life; and this was one reason that made me willing to prolong my own. I was sometimes divided between the two, not thinking it practicable to effect both. The Lord had now to appearance given me up to judicial blindness; I was capable of anything. I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor (so far as I remember) the least sensibility of conscience. I was possessed of so strong a spirit of delusion, that I believed my own lie, and was firmly persuaded that after death I should cease to be: yet the Lord preserved me! Some intervals of sober reflection would at times take place: when I have chosen death rather than life, a ray of hope would come in (though there was little probability for such a hope) that I should yet see better days, that I might again return to England, and have my wishes crowned, if I did not wilfully throw myself away. In a word, my love to Mrs. N***** was now the only restraint I had left; though I neither feared God, nor regarded men, I could not bear that she should think meanly of me when I was dead. As in the outward concerns of life, the weakest means are often employed by divine providence to produce great effects, beyond their common influence (as when a disease, for instance, has been removed by a fright), so I found it then: this single thought, which had not restrained me from a thousand smaller evils, proved my only and effectual barrier against the greatest and most fatal temptations. How long I could have supported this conflict, or what, humanly speaking, would have been the consequence of my continuing in that situation, I cannot say; but the Lord, whom I little thought of, knew my danger, and was providing for my deliverance.

Two things I had determined when at Plymouth, that I would not go to India, and that I would go to Guinea; and such, indeed, was the Lord's will concerning me; but they were to be accomplished in his way, not in my own. We had been now at Madeira some time; the business of the fleet was completed, and we were to sail the following day. On that memorable morning I was late in bed, and had slept longer, but that one of the midshipmen (an old companion) came down, and, between jest and earnest, bade me rise; and as I did not immediately comply, he cut down the hammock or bed in which I lay, which forced me to dress myself. I was very angry, but durst not resent it. I was little aware how much his caprice affected me, and that this person, who had no design in what he did, was the messenger of God's providence. I said little, but went upon deck, where I that moment, saw a man putting his clothes into a boat, who told me he was going to leave us. Upon inquiring, I was informed that two men from a Guinea ship, which lay near us, had entered on board the Harwich, and that the commodore (the present Sir George Pocock) had ordered the captain to send two others in their room. My heart instantly burned like fire. I begged the boat might be detained a few minutes; I ran to the lieutenants, and intreated them to intercede with the captain that I might be dismissed. Upon this occasion, though I had been formerly on ill terms with these officers, and had disobliged them all in their turns, yet they had pitied my case, and were ready to serve me now. The captain, who, when we were at Plymouth, had refused to exchange me, though at the request of admiral Medley, was now easily prevailed on. I believe, in little more than half an hour from my being asleep in my bed, I saw myself discharged, and safe on board another ship. This was one of the many critical turns of my life, in

which the Lord was pleased to display his providence and care, by causing many unexpected circumstances to concur in almost an instant of time. These sudden opportunities were several times repeated: each of them brought me into an entire new scene of action; and they were usually delayed to almost the last moment, in which they could have taken place.

The ship I went on board of was bound to Sierra Leon, and the adjacent parts of what is called the Windward Coast of Africa. The commander I found, was acquainted with my father: he received me very kindly, and made fair professions of assistance, and I believe he would have been my friend; but without making the least advantage of former mistakes and troubles, I pursued the same course; nay, if possible, I acted much worse. On board the Harwich, though my principles were totally corrupted, yet, as upon my first going there I was in some degree staid and serious, the remembrance of this made me ashamed of breaking out in that notorious manner I could otherwise have indulged. But now, entering amongst strangers, I could appear without disguise; and I well remember, that while I was passing from the one ship to the other, this was one reason why I rejoiced in the exchange, and one reflection I made upon the occasion, viz. that I now might be as abandoned as I pleased, without any control: and, from this time, I was exceedingly vile indeed, little if any thing short of that animated description of an almost irrecoverable state, which we have in 2 Peter ii. 14. I not only sinned with a high hand myself; but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion: nay, I eagerly sought occasion sometimes to my own hazard and hurt. One natural consequence of this carriage was, a loss of the favour of my new captain; not that he was at all religious, or disliked my wickedness, any further than it affected his interest; but I became careless and disobedient: I did not please him, because I did not intend it; and, as he was a man of an odd temper likewise, we the more easily disagreed. Besides, I had a little of that unlucky wit, which can do little more than multiply troubles and enemies to its possessor; and upon some imagined affront, I made a song, in which I ridiculed his ship, his designs, and his person, and soon taught it to the whole ship's company. Such was the ungrateful return I made for his offers of friendship and protection. I had mentioned no names, but the allusion was intention of the author.—I shall say no more of this part of my story; let it be buried in eternal silence. But let me not be silent from the praise of that grace which could pardon that blood which could expiate such sins as mine; yea, “the Ethiopian may change his skin, and the leopard his spots,” since I, who was the willing slave of every evil, possessed with a legion of unclean spirits, have been spared, and saved, and changed, to stand as a monument of his almighty power for ever.

Thus I went on for about six months, by which time the ship was preparing to leave the coast. A few days before she sailed the captain died. I was not upon much better terms with his mate, who now succeeded to the command, and had upon some occasion treated me ill: I made no doubt, but, if I went with him to the West Indies, he would put me on board a man-of-war; and this, from what I had known already, was more dreadful to me than death. To avoid it, I determined to remain in Africa, and amused myself with many golden dreams, that here I should find an opportunity of improving my fortune.

There are still upon that part of the coast a few white men settled (and there were many more at the time I was first there), whose business it was to purchase slaves, &c. in the rivers and country adjacent, and sell them to the ships at an advanced price. One of these, who at first landed in my indigent circumstances, had acquired considerable wealth: he had lately been in England, and was returning in the vessel I was in, of which he owned a quarter part. His example impressed me with hopes of the same success; and upon condition of entering into his service, I obtained my discharge. I had not the precaution to make any terms, but trusted to his generosity. I received no compensation for my time on board the ship, but a bill upon the owners in England, which was never paid; for they failed before my return. The day before the vessel sailed I landed upon the island of Benanoes, with little more than the clothes upon my back, as if I had escaped shipwreck.

I am, dear Sir,
Your's, &c.

January 17, 1763.