

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 VI.

DEAR SIR,

THERE is much piety and spirit in the grateful acknowledgment of Jacob, "With my staff I passed this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." They are words which ought to affect me with a peculiar emotion. I remember that in some of those mournful days, to which my last letter refers, I was busied in planting some lime or lemon trees. The plants I put into the ground were no longer than a young gooseberry bush; my master and his mistress passing by the place, stopped a while to look at me; at last, "Who knows," says he, "who knows but by the time these trees grow up and bear, you may go home to England, obtain the command of a ship, and return to reap the fruits of your labours; we see strange things sometimes happen." This, as he intended it, was a cutting sarcasm. I believe he thought it full as probable, that I should live to be king of Poland; yet it proved a prediction, and they (one of them at least) lived to see me return from England in the capacity he had mentioned, and pluck some of the first limes from those very trees. How can I proceed in my relation, till I raise a monument to the divine goodness, by comparing the circumstances in which the Lord has since placed me, with what I was at that time! Had you seen me, Sir, then go so pensive and solitary in the dead of night to wash my one shirt upon the rocks, and afterwards put it on wet, that it might dry upon my back, while I slept; had you seen me so poor a figure, that when a ship's boat came to the island, shame often constrained me to hide myself in the woods, from the sight of strangers; especially, had you known that my conduct, principles, and heart, were still darker than my outward condition, how little would you have imagined, that one, who so fully answered to the 'Hateful, and hating one another', of the apostle, was reserved to be so peculiar an instance of the providential care and exuberant goodness of God. There was, at that time, but one earnest desire in my heart, which was not contrary and shocking both to religion and reason; that one desire, though my vile licentious life rendered me peculiarly unworthy of success, and though a thousand difficulties seemed to render it impossible, the Lord was pleased to gratify. But this favour, though great, and greatly prized, was a small thing compared to the blessings of his grace: he spared me, to give me the knowledge of himself, in the person of Jesus Christ; in love to my soul he delivered me from the pit of corruption, and cast all my aggravated sins behind his back. He brought my feet into the paths of peace. This is indeed the chief article, but it is not the whole. When he made me acceptable to himself in the beloved, he gave me favour in the sight of others. He raised me new friends, protected and guided me through a long series of dangers, and crowned every day with repeated mercies. To him I owe it that I am still alive, and that I am not still living in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and the want of all things: into that state I brought myself, but it was he who delivered me. He has given me an easy situation in life, some experimental knowledge of his gospel, a large acquaintance amongst his people, a friendship and correspondence with several of his most honoured servants. But it is as difficult to enumerate my present advantages, as it is fully to describe the evils and miseries of the preceding contrast.

I know not exactly how long things continued with me thus, but I believe near a twelvemonth. In this interval I wrote two or three times to my father; I

gave him an account of my condition, and desired his assistance, intimating at the same time, that I had resolved not to return to England, unless he was pleased to send for me; I have likewise letters by me wrote to Mrs. N***** in that dismal period; so that at the lowest ebb, it seems I still retained a hope of seeing her again. My father applied to his friend in Liverpool, of whom I have spoken before, who gave orders accordingly to a captain of his, who was then fitting out for Gambia and Sierra Leon.

Some time within the year, as I have said, I obtained my master's consent to live with another trader, who dwelt upon the same island. Without his consent, I could not be taken, and he was unwilling to do it sooner, but it was then brought about. This was an alteration much to my advantage; I was soon decently clothed, lived in plenty, was considered as a companion, and trusted with the care of all his domestic effects, which were to the amount of some thousand pounds. This man had several factories and white servants if in different places, particularly one in Kittam, the river I spoke of which runs so near along the sea coast. I was soon appointed to go there, where I had a share in the management of business, jointly with another of his servants: we lived as we pleased, business flourished, and our employer was satisfied. Here I began to be wretch enough to think myself happy. There is a significant phrase frequently used in those parts, that such a white man is grown black. It does not intend an alteration of complexion, but disposition. I have known several, who, settling in Africa after the age of thirty or forty, have at that time of life been gradually assimilated to the tempers, customs, and ceremonies of the natives, so far as to prefer that country to England; they have even become dupes to all the pretended charms, necromances, amulets, and divinations of the blinded negroes, and put more trust in such things than the wiser sort among the natives. A part of this spirit of infatuation was growing upon me; in time perhaps I might have yielded to the whole: I entered into closer engagements with the inhabitants, and should have lived and died a wretch amongst them, if the Lord had not watched over me for good. Not that I had lost those ideas which chiefly engaged my heart to England, but despair of seeing them accomplished made me willing to remain where I was. I thought I could more easily bear the disappointment in this situation, than nearer home. But, so soon as I had fixed my connections and plans with these views, the Lord providentially interposed to break them in pieces, and save me from ruin in spite of myself.

In the mean time, the ship that had orders to bring me home arrived at Sierra Leon: the captain made inquiry for me there and at the Benanoes; but understanding that I was at a great distance in the country, he thought no more about me. Without doubt the hand of God directed my being placed at Kittam just at this time; for, as the ship came no nearer than the Benanoes, and stayed but a few days, if I had been at the Plantanes, I could not perhaps have heard of her till she had been sailed. The same must have certainly been the event, had I been sent to any other factory, of which my new master had several upon different rivers. But though the place I was at, was a long way up a river, much more than a hundred miles distant from the Plantanes, yet, by the peculiar situation which I have already noticed, I was still within a mile of the sea coast. To make the interposition more remarkable, I was at that very juncture going in quest of trade to a place at some distance directly from the sea, and should have set out a day or two before, but that we waited for a few

articles from the next ship that offered, to complete the assortment of goods I was to take with me. We used sometimes to walk to the beach in expectation of seeing a vessel pass by, but this was very precarious as at that time the place was not at all resorted to by ships for trade. Many passed in the night, others kept at a considerable distance from the shore. In a word, I do not know that any one had stopped while I was there, though some had before, upon observing a signal made from the shore. In February, 1747 (I know not the exact day), my fellow servant walking down to the beach in the forenoon, saw a vessel sailing past, and made a smoke in token of trade. She was already a little beyond the place, and, as the wind was fair, the captain was in some demur whether to stop or not: however, had my companion been half an hour later, she would have gone beyond reach; but he soon saw her come to anchor, and went on board in a canoe: and this proved the very ship I have spoken of. One of the first questions he was asked, was concerning me; and when the captain understood I was so near, he came on shore to deliver his message. Had an invitation from home reached me, when I was sick and starving at the Plantanes, I should have received it as life from the dead; but now, for the reasons already given, I heard it at first with indifference. The captain, unwilling to lose me, told a story altogether of his own framing: he gave me a very plausible account, how he had missed a large packet of letters and papers, which he should have brought with him; but this, he said, he was sure of, having had it from my father's own mouth, as well as from his employer, that a person lately dead had left me L.400 per annum; adding further, that if I was any way embarrassed in my circumstances, he had express orders to redeem me, though it should cost one half of his cargo. Every particular of this was false; nor could I myself believe what he said about the estate; but, as I had some expectations from an aged relation, I thought a part of it might be true. But I was not long in suspense: for though my father's care and desire to see me had too little weight with me, and would have been insufficient to make me quit my retreat, yet the remembrance of Mrs. N*****, the hopes of seeing her, and the possibility, that accepting this offer might once more put me in a way of gaining her hand, prevailed over all other considerations. The captain further promised (and in this he kept his word), that I should lodge in his cabin, dine at his table, and be his constant companion, without expecting any service from me. And thus I was suddenly freed from a captivity of about fifteen months. I had neither a thought nor a desire of this change one hour before it took place. I embarked with him, and in a few hours lost sight of Kittam.

How much is their blindness to be pitied, who can see nothing but chance in events of this sort. So blind and stupid was I at that time, I made no reflection. I sought no direction in what had happened; like a wave of the sea driven with the wind, and tossed, I was governed by present appearances and looked no further. But he, who is eyes to the blind, was leading me in a way that I knew not.

Now I am in some measure enlightened, I can easily perceive that it is in the adjustment and concurrence of these seemingly fortuitous circumstances, that the ruling power and wisdom of God is most evidently displayed in human affairs. How many such casual events: may we remark in the history of Joseph, which had each a necessary influence in his ensuing promotion! If he had not dreamed, or if he had not told his dream; if the Midianites had passed

by a day sooner or a day later; if they had sold him to any person but Potiphar; if his mistress had been a better woman; if Pharaoh's officers had not displeased their lord; or if any, or all these things had fallen out in any other manner or time than they did, all that followed had been prevented: the promises and purposes of God concerning Israel, their bondage, deliverances, polity, and settlement, must have failed; and, as all these things tended to, and centred in Christ, the promised Saviour, the desire of all nations would not have appeared; mankind had been still in their sins, without hope, and the counsels of God's eternal love in favour of sinners defeated. Thus we may see a connection between Joseph's first dream, and the death of our Lord Christ, with all its glorious consequences. So strong, though secret, is the concatenation between the greatest and the smallest events! What a comfortable thought is this to a believer to know, that amidst all the various interfering designs of men, the Lord has one constant design which he cannot, will not miss, namely, his own glory in the complete salvation of his people; and that he is wise, and strong, and faithful, to make even those things, which seem contrary to this design, subservient to promote it. You have allowed me to comment upon my own text, yet the length of this observation may need some apology. Believe me to be, with great respect,

Dear Sir,

Your affectionate and obliged servant.

January 18, 1763.