

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 VII.

DEAR SIR,

THE ship I was now on board as a passenger, was on a trading voyage for gold, ivory, dyers wood, and bees wax. It requires much longer time to collect a cargo of this sort than of slaves. The captain began his trade at Gambia, had been already four or five months in Africa, and continued there a year, or thereabouts, after I was with him; in which time we ranged the whole coast, as far as Cape Lopez, which lies about a degree south of the Equinoctial, and more than a thousand miles farther from England than the place where I embarked. I have little to offer worthy your notice, in the course of his tedious voyage. I had no business to employ my thoughts, but sometimes amused myself with mathematics: excepting this, my whole life, when awake, was a course of most horrid impiety and profaneness. I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer: not content with common oaths and imprecations, I daily invented new ones; so that I was often seriously reproved by the captain, who was himself a very passionate man, and not at all circumspect in his expressions. From the relation I at times made him of my past adventures, and what he saw of my conduct, and especially towards the close of the voyage when we met with many disasters, he would often tell me that, to his great grief he had a Jonah on board; that a curse attended me wherever I went; and that all the troubles he met with in the voyage, were owing to his having taken me into the vessel. I shall omit any further particulars, and after mentioning an instance or two of the Lord's mercy to me, while I was thus defying his power and patience, I shall proceed to something more worthy your perusal.

Although I lived long in the excess of almost every other extravagance, I never was fond of drinking; and my father has often been heard to say, that while I avoided drunkenness, he should still entertain hopes of my recovery. But sometimes I would promote a drinking-bout for a frolic's sake, as I termed it: for though I did not love the liquor, I was sold to do iniquity, and delighted in mischief. The last abominable frolic of this sort I engaged in, was in the river Gabon; the proposal and expense were my own. Four or five of us one evening sat upon deck, to see who could hold out longest in drinking geneva and rum alternately; a large sea-shell supplied the place of a glass. I was very unfit for a challenge of this sort, for my head was always incapable of bearing much strong drink. However, I began and proposed the first toast, which, I well remember, was some imprecation against the person who should start first. This proved to be myself. My brain was soon fired: I arose, and danced about the deck like a madman; and while I was thus diverting my companions, my hat went overboard. By the light of the moon, I saw the shin's boat, and eagerly threw myself over the side to get into her, that I might recover my hat. My sight in that circumstance deceived me, for the boat was not within my reach, as I had thought, but perhaps twenty feet from the ship's side. I was, however, half over board, and should in one moment more have plunged myself into the water, when somebody caught hold of my clothes behind, and pulled me back. This was an amazing escape; for I could not swim if I had been sober; the tide ran very strong; my companions were too much intoxicated to save me; and the rest of the ship's company were asleep. So

near I was, to appearance, of perishing in that dreadful condition, and sinking into eternity under the weight of my own curse.

Another time, at Cape Lopez, some of us had been in the woods, and shot a buffalo or wild cow. We brought a part of it on board, and carefully marked the place (as I thought) where we left the remainder. In the evening we returned to fetch it; but we set out too late. I undertook to be their guide; but night coming on before we could reach the place, we lost our way. Sometimes we were in swamps up to the middle in water, and when we recovered dry land, we could not tell whether we were walking towards the ship, or wandering farther from her. Every step increased our uncertainty. The night grew darker, and we were entangled in inextricable woods, where, perhaps, the foot of man had never trod before. That part of the country is entirely abandoned to wild beasts, with which it prodigiously abounds. We were indeed in a terrible case, having neither light, food, nor arms, and expecting a tiger to rush from behind every tree. The stars were clouded, and we had no compass to form a judgment which way we were going. Had things continued thus, we had probably perished; but it pleased God, no beast came near us; and, after some hours of perplexity, the moon arose, and pointed out the eastern quarter. It appeared then, as we had expected, that instead of drawing near to the sea side, we had been penetrating into the country; but, by the guidance of the moon, we at length came to the water side, a considerable distance from the ship. We got safe on board, without any other inconvenience than what we suffered from fear and fatigue.

Those and many other deliverances were all, at that time, entirely lost upon me. The admonitions of conscience, which, from successive repulses, had grown weaker and weaker, at length entirely ceased; and for a space of many months, if not for some years, I cannot recollect, that I had a single check of that sort. At times I have been visited with sickness, and have believed myself near to death, neither but I had not the least concern about the consequences. In a word, I seemed to have every mark of final impenitence and rejection; judgments nor mercies made the least impression on me.

At length, our business finished, we left Cape Lopez, and after a few days stay at the island of Annabona, to lay in provisions, we sailed homeward about the beginning of January 1748. From Annabona to England, without touching at any intermediate port, is a very long navigation, perhaps more than seven thousand miles, if we include the circuits necessary to be made on account of the trade-winds. We sailed first westward, till near the coast of Brazil, then northward, to the banks of Newfoundland, with the usual variations of wind and weather, and without meeting any thing extraordinary. On these banks we stopped half a day to fish for cod; this was then chiefly for diversion; we had provisions enough, and little expected those fish (as it afterwards proved) would be all we should have to subsist on. We left the banks on the first of March, with a hard gale of wind, westerly, which pushed us fast homewards. I should here observe, that, with the length of this voyage, in a hot climate, the vessel was greatly out of repair, and very unfit to support stormy weather; the sails and cordage were likewise very much worn out, and many such circumstances concurred to render what followed more dangerous. I think it was on the ninth of March, the day before our catastrophe, that I felt a thought pass through my mind, which I had long been a stranger to. Among the few books we had on board, one was Stanhope's Thomas a Kempis; I carelessly

took it up, as I had often done before, to pass away the time; but I had still read it with the same indifference as if it was entirely a romance. However, while I was reading this time, an involuntary suggestion arose in my mind: What if these things should be true? I could not bear the force of the inference, as it related to myself: and therefore shut the book presently. My conscience witnessed against me once more, and I concluded that, true or false, I must abide the consequences of my own choice. I put an abrupt end to these reflections, by joining in with some vain conversation or other that came in my way.

But now the Lord's time was come, and the conviction I was so unwilling to receive, was deeply impressed upon me by an awful dispensation. I went to bed that night in my usual security and indifference, but was awakened from a sound sleep by the force of a violent sea which broke on board us; so much of it came down below as filled the cabin I lay in with water. This alarm was followed by a cry from the deck, that the ship was going down or sinking. As soon as I could recover myself, I essayed to go upon deck; but was met upon the ladder by the captain, who desired me to bring a knife with me. While I returned for the knife, another person went up in my room, who was instantly washed overboard. We had no leisure to lament him, nor did we expect to survive him long, for we soon found the ship was filling with water very fast. The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made a mere wreck in a few minutes. I shall not affect to describe this disaster in the marine dialect, which would be understood by few; and therefore I can give you but a very inadequate idea of it. Taking in all circumstances, it was astonishing, and almost miraculous, that any of us survived to relate the story. We had immediate recourse to the pumps; but the water increased against our efforts. Some of us were set to baling in another part of the vessel; that is, to lade it out with buckets and pails. We had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service; and, notwithstanding all we could do, she was full, or very near it: and then, with a common cargo, she must have sunk of course; but we had a great quantity of bees wax and wood on board, which were specifically lighter than the water; and as it pleased God that we received this shock in the very crisis of the gale, towards morning we were enabled to employ some means for our safety, which succeeded beyond hope. In about an hour's time, the day began to break, and the wind abated. We expended most of our clothes and bedding to stop the leaks (though the weather was exceedingly cold, especially to us, who had so lately left a hot climate); over these we nailed pieces of boards, and at last perceived the water abate. At the beginning of this hurry, I was little affected. I pumped hard, and endeavoured to animate myself and companions: I told one of them, that in a few days this distress would serve us to talk of over a glass of wine; but he being a less hardened sinner than myself, replied, with tears, "No; it is too late now." About nine o'clock, being almost spent with cold and labour, I went to speak with the captain, who was busied elsewhere, and just as I was returning from him, I said, almost without any meaning, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us." This (though spoken with little reflection) was the first desire I had breathed for mercy for the space of many years. I was instantly struck with my own words; and, as Jehu said once, "What hast thou to do with peace?" so it directly occurred, "What mercy can there be for me?" I was obliged to return to the pump, and there I continued till noon, almost every passing wave breaking over my head;

but we made ourselves fast with ropes, that we might not be washed away. Indeed, I expected that every time the vessel descended in the sea, she would rise no more; and though I dreaded death now, and my heart foreboded the worst, if the scriptures, which I had long since opposed, were indeed true; yet still I was but half convinced, and remained for a space of time in a sullen frame, a mixture of despair and impatience. I thought, if the Christian religion was true, I could not be forgiven; and was, therefore, expecting, and almost at times wishing, to know the worst of it.

I am,
Your's, &c.

January 19, 1763.