

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.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

EDINBURGH

Printed at the University Press, for

PETER BROWN AND THOMAS NELSON.

1830.

LETTER VIII.

DEAR SIR,

THE tenth (that is, in the present style, the twenty-first) of March, is a day much to be remembered by me, and I have never suffered it to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high, and delivered me out of the deep waters. I continued at the pump from three in the morning till near noon, and then I could do no more. I went and lay down upon my bed, uncertain, and almost indifferent, whether I should rise again. In an hour's time I was called, and not being able to pump, I went to the helm, and steered the ship till midnight, excepting a small interval for refreshment. I had here leisure and convenient opportunity for reflection. I began to think of my former religious professions; the extraordinary turns in my life; the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with; the licentious course of my conversation, particularly my unparalleled effrontery in making the gospel history (which I could not now be sure was false, though I was not yet assured it was true) the constant subject of profane ridicule. I thought, allowing the scripture promises, there never was nor could be such a sinner as myself; and then, comparing the advantages I had broken through, as I concluded, at first, that my sins were too great to be forgiven. The scripture likewise seemed to say the same; for I had formerly been well acquainted with the Bible, and many passages, upon this occasion, returned upon my memory, particularly those awful passages, Prov. i. 24-31, Heb. vi. 4, 6, and 2 Pet. ii. 20, which seemed so exactly to suit my case and character, as to bring with them a presumptive proof of a divine original. Thus, as I have said, I waited with fear and impatience to receive my inevitable doom. Yet, though I had thoughts of this kind, they were exceeding faint and disproportionate. It was not till long after (perhaps several years), till I had gained some clear views of the infinite righteousness and grace of Christ Jesus, my Lord, that I had a deep and strong apprehension of my state by nature and practice; and, perhaps, till then, I could not have borne the sight. So wonderfully does the Lord proportion the discoveries of sin and grace; for he knows our frame, and that, if he was to put forth the greatness of his power, a poor sinner would be instantly overwhelmed, and crushed as a moth. But to return: when I saw, beyond all probability, there was still hope of respite, and heard, about six in the evening, that the ship was freed from water, there arose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour; I began to pray; I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him father: my prayer was like the cry of the ravens, which yet the Lord does not disdain to hear. I now began to think of that Jesus whom I had so often derided: I recollected the particulars of his life and of his death; a death for sins not his own, but, as I remembered, for the sake of those who, in their distress, should put their trust in him. And now I chiefly wanted evidence. The comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted, and I rather wished than believed these things were real facts. You will please to observe, Sir, that I collect the strain of the reasonings and exercises of my mind in one view; but I do not say that all this passed at one time. The great question now was, how to obtain faith. I speak not of an appropriating faith (of which I then knew neither the nature nor necessity), but how I should gain an assurance that the scriptures were of divine

inspiration, and a sufficient warrant for the exercise of trust and hope in God. One of the first helps I received (in consequence of a determination to examine the New Testament more carefully) was from Luke xi. 13. I had been sensible, that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when in reality I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God; but here I found a Spirit spoken of, which was to be communicated to those who ask it. Upon this I reasoned thus: If this book is true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise; I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask. I must therefore pray for it, and, if it is of God, he will make good his own word. My purposes were strengthened by John vii. 17. I concluded from thence, that though I could not say from my heart, that I believed the gospel, yet I would, for the present, take it for granted; and that, by studying it in this light, I should be more and more confirmed in it. If what I am writing could be perused by our modern infidels, they would say (for I too well know their manner), that I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was, and so would they be, if the Lord should show them, as he was pleased to show me at that time, the absolute necessity of some expedient to interpose between a righteous God and a sinful soul. Upon the gospel scheme I saw, at least, a peradventure of hope, but on every other side I was surrounded with black unfathomable despair.

The wind was now moderate, but continued fair, and we were still drawing nearer to our port. We began to recover from our consternation, though we were greatly alarmed by our circumstances. We found that, the water having floated all our moveables in the hold, all the casks of provision had been beaten to pieces by the violent motion of the ship: on the other hand, our live stock, such as pigs, sheep, and poultry, had been washed overboard in the storm. In effect, all the provisions we saved, except the fish I had mentioned, and some food of the pulse kind, which used to be given to the hogs (and there was but little of this left), all our other provisions would have subsisted us but a week, at scanty allowance. The sails, too, were mostly blown away, so that we advanced but slowly, even while the wind was fair. We imagined ourselves about a hundred leagues from the land, but were in reality much further. Thus we proceeded with an alternate prevalence of hope and fear. My leisure time was chiefly employed in reading and meditating on the scriptures, and praying to the Lord for mercy and instruction.

Things continued thus for four or five days, or perhaps longer, till we were awakened one morning, by the joyful shouts of the watch upon deck, proclaiming the sight of land. We were all soon raised at the sound. The dawning was uncommonly beautiful, and the light (just strong enough to discover distant objects) presented us with a gladdening prospect: it seemed a mountainous coast, about twenty miles from us, terminating in a cape or point, and a little farther, two or three small islands, or hummocks, as if just rising out of the water; the appearance and position seemed exactly answerable to our hopes, resembling the north-west extremity of Ireland, which we were steering for. We sincerely congratulated each other, making no doubt, but that if the wind continued, we should be in safety and plenty the next day. The small remainder of our brandy (which was reduced to little more than a pint) was, by the captain's orders, distributed amongst us; he adding at the same time, "We shall soon have brandy enough." We likewise eat up the residue of our bread

for joy of this welcome sight, and were in the condition of men suddenly relieved from death. While we were thus alert, the mate, with a graver tone than the rest, sunk our spirits by saying, that, "he wished it might prove land at last." If one of the common sailors had first said so, I know not but the rest would have beat him for raising such an unreasonable doubt. It brought on, however, warm debates and disputes whether it was land or no; but the case was soon unanswerably decided; for the day was advancing fast, and in a little time, one of our fancied islands began to grow red, from the approach of the sun, which soon arose just under it. In a word, we had been prodigal of our bread and brandy too hastily; our land was literally in nubibus, nothing but clouds, and in half an hour more the whole appearance was dissipated. Seamen have often known deceptions of this sort, but in our extremity we were loath to be undeceived. However, we comforted ourselves, that though we could not see the land, yet we should soon, the wind hitherto continuing fair; but, alas ! we were deprived of this hope likewise. That very day our fair wind subsided into a calm, and the next morning the gales sprung up from the south-east, directly against us, and continued so for more than a fortnight afterwards. The ship was so wrecked, that we were obliged to keep the wind always on the broken side, unless the weather was quite moderate: thus we were driven, by the wind fixing in that quarter, still further from our port, to the northward of all Ireland, as far as the Lewis or western islands of Scotland, but a long way to the westward. In a word, our station was such as deprived us of any hope of being relieved by other vessels: it may, indeed, be questioned, whether our ship was not the very first that had been in that part of the ocean, at the same season of the year.

Provisions now began to grow very short; the half of a salted cod was a day's subsistence for twelve people; we had plenty of fresh water, but not a drop of stronger liquor; no bread, hardly any clothes, and very cold weather. We had incessant labour with the pumps, to keep the ship above water. Much labour and little food wasted us fast, and one man died under the hardship. Yet our sufferings were light in comparison of our just fears; we could not afford this bare allowance much longer, but had a terrible prospect of being either starved to death, or reduced to feed upon one another. Our expectations grew darker every day, and I had a further trouble peculiar to myself. The captain, whose temper was quite soured by distress, was hourly reproaching me (as I formerly observed) as the sole cause of the calamity, and was confident that if I was thrown overboard, and not otherwise, they should be preserved from death. He did not intend to make the experiment, but continual repetition of this in my ears gave me much uneasiness, especially as my conscience seconded his words. I thought it very probable, that all that had befallen us was on my account. I was, at last, found out by the powerful hand of God, and condemned in my own breast. However, proceeding in the method I have described, we began to conceive hopes greater than our fears, especially, when at the time we were ready to give up all for lost, and despair was taking place in every countenance, we saw the wind come about to the very point we wished it, so as best to suit that broken part of the ship which must be kept out of the water, and to blow so gently as our few remaining sails could bear; and thus it continued without any observable alteration or increase, though at an unsettled time of the year, till we once more were called up to see the land, and were convinced that it was land indeed. We saw the island Tory, and the next day

anchored in Lough Satiny, in Ireland; this was the eighth of April, just four weeks after the damage was sustained from the sea. When we came into this port our very last victuals were boiling in the pot; and before we had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained till we were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence, so that if we had continued at sea that night in our shattered, enfeebled condition, we must, in all human appearance, have gone to the bottom. About this time I began to know that there is a God that hears and answers prayer. How many times has he appeared for me since this great deliverance:—yet, alas! how distrustful and ungrateful is my heart unto this hour.

I am, dear Sir,

Your obliged humble servant.

January 19, 1763.