

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV . JOHN NEWTON

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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 IX.

DEAR SIR,

I HAVE brought my history down to the time of my arrival in Ireland, 1748; but before I proceed, I would look back a little, to give you some farther account of the state of my mind, and how far I was helped against inward difficulties, which beset me, at the time I had many outward hardships to struggle with. The straits of hunger, cold, weariness, and the fears of sinking, and starving, I shared in common with others; but besides these, I felt a heart-bitterness, which was properly my own; no one on board, but myself being impressed with any sense of the hand of God in our danger and deliverance, at least not awakened to any concern for their souls. No temporal dispensations can reach the heart, unless the Lord himself applies them. My companions in danger were either quite unaffected, or soon forgot it all, but it was not so with me: not that I was any wiser or better than they, but because the Lord was pleased to vouchsafe me peculiar mercy, otherwise I was the most unlikely person in the ship to receive an impression, having been often before quite stupid and hardened in the very face of great dangers, and always to this time had hardened my neck still more and more after every reproof. I can see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy, but this, "that so it seemed good to him;" unless it was to show, by one astonishing instance, that with him "nothing is impossible."

There were no persons on board to whom I could open myself with freedom, concerning the state of my soul, none from whom I could ask advice. As to books, I had a New Testament, Stanhope, already mentioned, and a volume of bishop Beveridge's sermons, one of which, upon our Lord's passion, affected me much. In perusing the New Testament, I was struck with several passages, particularly that of the fig-tree, Luke xiii. The case of St. Paul, 1 Tim. i, but particularly the prodigal, Luke xv, a case, I thought, that had never been so nearly exemplified, as by myself; and then the goodness of the father in receiving, nay, in running to meet such a son, and this intended only to illustrate the Lord's goodness to returning sinners,—this gained upon me. I continued much in prayer; I saw that the Lord had interposed so far to save me, and I hoped he would do more. The outward circumstances helped in this place to make me still more serious and earnest in crying to him, who alone could relieve me; and sometimes I thought I could be content to die, even for want of food, so I might but die a believer. Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland, I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the truth of the gospel, as considered in itself, and its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. I saw that, by the way they are pointed out, God might declare not his mercy only, but his justice also, in the pardon of sin, on account of the obedience and sufferings of Jesus Christ. My judgment, at that time, embraced the sublime doctrine of "God manifest in the flesh, reconciling the world to himself." I had no idea of those systems which allow the Saviour no higher honour than that of an upper servant, or, at the most, a demi-god. I stood in need of an Almighty Saviour, and such a one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvellous thing: I was no longer an infidel; I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and I had taken up some right notions, was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in

being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my misspent life, and purposed an immediate reformation: I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been deeply rooted in me, as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man.

But though I cannot doubt that this change, so far as it prevailed, was wrought by the Spirit and power of God, yet still I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my more enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of the spirituality and extent of the law of God; the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ, and a continual dependence on him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort, was a mystery of which I had as yet no knowledge. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come. I had no Christian friend or faithful minister to advise me, that my strength was no more than my righteousness; and though I soon began to inquire for serious books, yet, not having spiritual discernment, I frequently made a wrong choice, and I was not brought in the way of evangelical preaching or conversation (except a few times when I heard but understood not) for six years after this period. Those things the Lord was pleased to discover to me gradually. I learnt them here a little and there a little, by my own painful experience, at a distance from the common means and ordinances, and in the midst of the same course of evil company and bad examples I had been conversant with for some time. From this period I could no more make a mock at sin, or jest with holy things; I no more questioned the truth of scripture, or lost a sense of the rebukes of conscience. Therefore I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me; but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards.

I have told you that, in the time of our distress, we had fresh water in abundance; this was a considerable relief to us, especially as our spare diet was mostly salt fish, without bread. We drank plentifully, and were not afraid of wanting water; yet our stock of this likewise was much nearer to an end than we expected; we supposed that we had six large butts of water on board, and it was well that we were safe arrived in Ireland, before we discovered that five of them were empty, having been removed out of their places and stove by the violent agitation, when the ship was full of water. If we had found this out while we were at sea, it would have greatly heightened our distress, as we must have drunk more sparingly.

While the ship was refitting at Lough Swilly, I repaired to Londonderry. I lodged at an exceeding good house, where I was treated with much kindness, and soon recruited my health and strength. I was now a serious professor, went twice a day to the prayers at church, and determined to receive the sacrament the next opportunity. A few days before, I signified my intention to the minister, as the rubric directs; but I found this practice was grown obsolete. At length the day came; I arose very early, was very particular and earnest in my private devotion; and, with the greatest solemnity, engaged myself to be the Lord's for ever, and only his. This was not a formal, but a sincere surrender, under a warm sense of mercies recently received; and yet, for want of a better knowledge of myself and the subtlety of Satan's temptations, I was seduced to forget the vows of God that were upon me. Upon the whole, though, my views

of the gospel salvation were very indistinct, I experienced a peace and satisfaction in the ordinance that day, to which I had been hitherto a perfect stranger.

The next day I was abroad with the mayor of the city and some other gentlemen a-shooting; I climbed up a steep bank, and pulling my fowling-piece after me, as I held it in a perpendicular direction, it went off so near my face, as to burn away the corner of my hat. Thus, when we think ourselves in the greatest safety, we are no less exposed to danger than when all the elements seem conspiring to destroy us. The divine providence, which is sufficient to deliver us in our utmost extremity, is equally necessary to our preservation in the most peaceful situation.

During our stay in Ireland I wrote home. The vessel I was in had not been heard of for eighteen months, and was given up for lost long before. My father had no more expectation of hearing that I was alive, but he received my letter a few days before he left London. He was just going out governor of York Fort, in Hudson's Bay, from whence he never returned. He sailed before I arrived in England, or he had purposed to take me with him; but God designing otherwise, one hindrance or other delayed us in Ireland till it was too late. I received two or three affectionate letters from him, but I never had the pleasure of seeing him more, I had hopes, that in three years more, I should have had an opportunity of asking his forgiveness for the uneasiness my disobedience had given him; but the ship that was to have brought him home, came without him. According to the best accounts we received, he was seized with the cramp when bathing, and drowned a little before her arrival in the Bay.—Excuse, this digression.

My father, willing to contribute all in his power to my satisfaction, paid a visit before his departure to my friends in Kent, and gave his consent to the union which had been so long talked of. Thus, when I returned, I found I had only the consent of one person to obtain: with her I as yet stood at as great an uncertainty as on the first day I saw her.

I arrived at in the latter end of May, 1748, about the same day that my father sailed from the Nore, but found the Lord had provided me another father, in the gentleman whose ship had brought me home. He received me with great tenderness, and the strongest expressions of friendship and assistance: yet not more than he has since made good; for to him, as the instrument of God's goodness, I owe my all. Yet it would not have been in the power, even of this friend, to have served me effectually, if the Lord had not met with me on my way home, as I have related. Till then I was like the man possessed with the legion. No arguments, no persuasion, no views of interest, no remembrance of the past, or regard to the future, could have constrained me within the bounds of common prudence. But now I was in some measure restored to my senses. My friend immediately offered me the command of a ship; but, upon mature consideration, I declined it for the present. I had been hitherto always unsettled and careless, and therefore thought I had better make another voyage first, and learn to obey, and acquire a farther insight and experience in business, before I ventured to undertake such a charge. The mate of the vessel I came home in, was preferred to the command of a new ship, and I engaged to go in the station of mate with him. I made a short visit to London, &c. which did not fully answer my views. I had but one opportunity of seeing Mrs. N*****, of which I availed myself very little, for I was always exceeding awkward in pleading

my own cause, *viva voce*. But after my return to L——, I put the question in such a manner, by letter, that she could not avoid (unless I had greatly mistaken her) coming to some sort of an explanation. Her answer, though penned with abundance of caution, satisfied me; as I collected from it, that she was free from any other engagement, and not unwilling to wait the event of the voyage I had undertaken. I should be ashamed to trouble you with these little details, if you had not yourself desired me.

I am,

Yours &c.

January 20, 1763.