

THE
WORKS
OF
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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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CARDIPHONIA;

OR,

THE UTTERANCE OF THE HEART

IN THE COURSE OF

A REAL CORRESPONDENCE.

Hæc res et jungit, junctos et servat amicos.

Hor. Lib. i. Sat. 3.

As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.

Prov. xxvii. 19.

LETTERS TO A NOBLEMAN

LETTER I.

March — 1765.

MY LORD,

I REMEMBER, when I once had the pleasure of waiting on you, you were pleased to begin an interesting conversation, which, to my concern, was soon interrupted. The subject was concerning the causes, nature, and marks of a decline in grace; how it happens that we lose that warm impression of divine things, which in some favoured moments we think it almost impossible to forget; how far this change of frame is consistent with a spiritual growth in other respects; how to form a comparative judgment of our proficiency upon the whole; and by what steps the losses we sustain from our necessary connection with a sinful nature and a sinful world may be retrieved from time to time. I beg your Lordship's permission to fill up the paper with a view to these inquiries. I do not mean to offer a laboured essay on them, but such thoughts as shall occur while the pen is in my hand.

The awakened soul (especially when, after a season of distress and terror, it begins to taste that the Lord is gracious) finds itself as in a new world. No change in outward life can be so sensible, so affecting. No wonder, then, that, at such a time, little else can be thought of. The transition from darkness to light, from a sense of wrath to a hope of glory, is the greatest that can be imagined, and is oftentimes as sudden as wonderful. Hence the general characteristics of young converts are zeal and love. Like Israel at the Red Sea, they have just seen the wonderful works of the Lord, and they cannot but sing his praise; they are deeply affected with the danger they have lately escaped, and with the case of multitudes around them; who are secure and careless in the same alarming situation; and a sense of their own mercies, and a compassion for the souls of others, is so transporting, that they can hardly forbear preaching to every one they meet.

This emotion is highly just and reasonable, with respect to the causes from whence it springs; and it is doubtless a proof, not only of the imperfection, but the depravity of our nature, that we are not always thus affected. Yet it is not entirely genuine. If we examine this character closely, which

seems, at first sight, a pattern and a reproof to Christians of longer standing, we shall, for the most part, find it attended with considerable defects.

1. Such persons are very weak in faith. Their confidence arises rather from the lively impressions of joy within, than from a distinct and clear apprehension of the work of God in Christ. The comforts which are intended as cordials, to animate them against the opposition of an unbelieving world, they mistake and rest in as the proper evidences of their hope. And hence it comes to pass, that when the Lord varies his dispensations, and hides his face, they are soon troubled, and at their wits end.

2. They who are in this state of their first love, are seldom free from something of a censorious spirit. They have not yet felt all the deceitfulness of their own hearts; they are not well acquainted with the devices or temptations of Satan; and therefore know not how to sympathize or make allowances where allowances are necessary and due, and can hardly bear with any who do not discover the same earnestness as themselves.

3. They are likewise more or less under the influence of self-righteousness and self-will. They mean well; but not being as yet well acquainted with the spiritual meaning and proper use of the law, nor established in the life of faith, a part (oftentimes a very considerable part) of their zeal spends itself in externals and non-essentials, prompts them to practise what is not commanded, to refrain from what is lawful, and to observe various and needless austerities and singularities, as their tempers and circumstances differ.

However, with all their faults, methinks there is something very beautiful and engaging in the honest vehemence of a young convert. Some cold and rigid judges are ready to reject these promising appearances on account of incidental blemishes. But would a gardener throw away a fine nectarine, because it is green, and has not yet attained all that beauty and flavour which a few more showers and suns will impart? Perhaps it will hold, for the most part, in grace as in nature; some exceptions there are: if there is not some fire in youth, we can hardly expect a proper warmth in old age.

But the great and good Husbandman watches over what his own hand has planted, and carries on his work by a variety of different, and even contrary dispensations. While their mountain stands thus strong, they think they shall never be moved; but at length they find a change. Sometimes it comes on by insensible degrees. That part of their affection, which was purely natural, will abate, of course, when the power of novelty ceases: they will begin, in some instances, to perceive their own indiscretions; and an endeavour to correct the excesses of imprudent zeal will often draw them towards the

contrary extreme of remissness: the evils of their hearts, which, though overpowered, were not eradicated, will revive again: the enemy will watch his occasions to meet them with suitable temptations; and as it is the Lord's design that they should experimentally learn and feel their own weakness, he will, in some instances, be permitted to succeed. When guilt is thus brought upon the conscience, the heart grows hard, the hands feeble, and the knees weak; then confidence is shaken, the spirit of prayer interrupted, the armour gone, and thus things grow worse and worse, till the Lord is pleased to interpose; for though we can fall of ourselves, we cannot rise without his help. Indeed, every sin, in its own nature, has a tendency towards a final apostasy; but there is a provision in the covenant of grace, and the Lord, in his own time, returns to convince, humble, pardon, comfort, and renew the soul. He touches the rock, and the waters flow. By repeated experiments and exercises of this sort (for this wisdom is seldom acquired by one or a few lessons), we begin at length to learn that we are nothing, have nothing, can do nothing but sin. And thus we are gradually prepared to live more out of ourselves, and to derive all our sufficiency of every kind from Jesus, the fountain of grace. We learn to tread more warily, to trust less to our own strength, to have lower thoughts of ourselves, and higher thoughts of him; in which two last particulars, I apprehend, what the scriptures mean by a growth of grace does properly consist. Both are increasing in the lively Christian, every day show him more of his own heart, and more of the power, sufficiency, compassion, and grace of his adorable Redeemer; but neither will be complete till we get to heaven.

I apprehend, therefore, that though we find an abatement of that sensible warmth of affection which we felt at first setting out; yet, if our views are more evangelical, our judgment more ripened, our hearts more habitually humbled under a sense of inward depravity, our tempers more softened into sympathy and tenderness; if our prevailing desires are spiritual, and we practically esteem the precepts, ordinances, and people of God; we may warrantably conclude, that his good work of grace in us is, upon the whole, on the increase.

But still it is to be lamented, that an increase of knowledge and experience should be so generally attended with a decline of fervour. If it was not for what has passed in my own heart, I should be ready to think it impossible. But this very circumstance gives me a still more emphatical conviction of my own vileness and depravity. The want of humiliation humbles me, and my very indifference rouses and awakens me to earnestness. There are, however, seasons of refreshment, ineffable glances of light and power upon

the soul, which, as they are derived from clearer displays of divine grace, if not so tumultuous as the first joys, are more penetrating, transforming, and animating. A glance of these, when compared with our sluggish stupidity when they are withheld, weans the heart from this wretched state of sin and temptation, and makes the thoughts of death and eternity desirable. Then this conflict shall cease: I shall sin and wander no more, see him as he is, and be like him for ever.

If the question is, How are these bright moments to be prolonged, renewed, or retrieved? We are directed to faith and diligence. A careful use of the appointed means of grace, a watchful endeavour to avoid the occasions and appearances of evil, and especially assiduity in secret prayer, will bring as much as the Lord sees good for us. He knows best why we are not to be trusted with them continually. Here we are to walk by faith, to be exercised and tried; by and by we shall be crowned, and the desires he has given shall be abundantly satisfied.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

April – 1766.

MY LORD,

I SHALL embrace your permission to fill my paper.—As to subject, that which has been a frequent theme of my heart of late, I shall venture to lay before your Lordship: I mean the remarkable and humbling difference which I suppose all who know themselves may observe, between their acquired and their experimental knowledge, or, in other words, between their judgment and their practice. To hear a believer speak his apprehensions of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the love of Christ, the beauty of holiness, or the importance of eternity, who would not suppose him proof against temptation? To hear with what strong arguments he can recommend watchfulness, prayer, forbearance, and submission, when he is teaching or advising others, who would not suppose but he could also teach himself, and influence his own conduct? Yet, alas! *quam dispar sibi!* The person who rose from his knees, before he left his chamber, a poor, indigent, fallible, dependent creature, who saw and acknowledged that he was unworthy to breathe the air, or to see the light, may meet with many occasions, before the day is closed, to discover the corruptions of his heart, and to show how weak and faint his best principles and clearest convictions are in their actual exercise. And in this view, how vain is man! what a contradiction is a believer to himself! He is called a believer emphatically, because he cordially assents to the word of God; but, alas! how often unworthy of the name! If I was to describe him from the scripture-character, I should say, he is one whose heart is athirst for God, for his glory, his image, his presence. His affections are fixed upon an unseen Saviour; his treasures, and consequently his thoughts, are on high, beyond the bounds of sense. Having experienced much forgiveness, he is full of bowels of mercy to all around; and having been often deceived by his own heart, he dares trust it no more, but lives, by faith in the Son of God, for wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification, and derives from him grace for grace; sensible that without him he has not sufficiency even to think a good thought. In short, he is dead to the world, to sin, to self, but alive to God, and lively in his service. Prayer is his breath, the word of God his food, and the ordinances more precious to him than the light of the sun. Such is a believer—in his judgment and prevailing desires.

But was I to describe him from experience, especially at some times, how different would the picture be! Though he knows that communion with God

is his highest privilege, he too seldom finds it so; on the contrary, if duty, conscience, and necessity, did not compel, he would leave the throne of grace unvisited from day to day. He takes up the Bible, conscious that it is the fountain of life and true comfort; yet, perhaps, while he is making the reflection, he feels a secret distaste, which prompts him to lay it down, and give his preference to a newspaper. He needs not to be told of the vanity and uncertainty of all beneath the sun; and yet is almost as much elated or cast down by a trifle, as those who have their portion in this world. He believes that all things shall work together for his good, and that the most high God appoints, adjusts, and over-rules all his concerns; yet he feels the risings of fear, anxiety, and displeasure, as though the contrary was true. He owns himself ignorant, and liable to be deceived by a thousand fallacies; yet is easily betrayed into positiveness and self-conceit. He feels himself an unprofitable, unfaithful, unthankful servant, and therefore blushes to harbour a thought of desiring the esteem and commendations of men; yet he cannot suppress it. Finally (for I must observe some bounds), on account of these, and many other inconsistencies, he is struck dumb before the Lord, stripped of every hope and plea, but what is provided in the free grace of God, and yet his heart is continually leaning and returning to a covenant of works.

Two questions naturally arise from such a view of ourselves. First, How can these things be, or why are they permitted? Since the Lord hates sin, teaches his people to hate it and cry against it, and has promised to hear their prayers, how is it that they go thus burdened? Surely if he could not or would not over-rule evil for good, he would not permit it to continue. By these exercises he teaches us more truly to know and feel the utter depravity and corruption of our whole nature, that we are indeed defiled in every part. His Method of salvation is likewise hereby exceedingly endeared to us: we see that it is and must be of grace, wholly of grace; and that the Lord Jesus Christ, and his perfect righteousness, is and must be our all in all. His power likewise in maintaining his own work, notwithstanding our infirmities, temptations, and enemies, is hereby displayed in the clearest light, his strength is manifested in our weakness. Satan likewise is more remarkably disappointed and put to shame, when he finds bounds set to his rage and policy, beyond which he cannot pass; and that those in whom he finds too much to work upon, and over whom he so often prevails for a season, escape at last out of his hands. He casts them down, but they are raised again; he wounds them, but they are healed: he obtains his desire to sift them as wheat, but the prayer of their great Advocate prevails for the maintenance of their faith. Farther, by what believers feel in themselves they learn by de-

grees how to warn, pity, and bear with others. A soft, patient, and compassionate spirit, and a readiness and skill in comforting those who are cast down, is not perhaps attainable in any other way. And lastly, I believe nothing more habitually reconciles a child of God to the thought of death, than the wearisomeness of this warfare. Death is unwelcome to nature: but then, and not till then, the conflict will cease. Then we shall sin no more. The flesh, with all its attendant evils, will be laid in the grave: then the soul, which has been partaker of a new and heavenly birth, shall be freed from every encumbrance, and stand perfect in the Redeemer's righteousness before God in glory.

But though these evils cannot be wholly removed, it is worthwhile to inquire, Secondly, How they may be mitigated. This we are encouraged to hope for. The word of God directs and animates to a growth in grace. And though we can do nothing spiritually of ourselves, yet there is a part assigned us. We cannot conquer the obstacles in our way by our own strength, yet we can give way to them; and if we do, it is our sin, and will be our sorrow. The disputes concerning inherent power in the creature, have been carried to inconvenient lengths: for my own part, I think it safest to use scriptural language. The apostles exhort us, to give all diligence, to resist the devil, to purge ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, to give ourselves to reading, meditation, and prayer, to watch, to put on the whole armour of God, and to abstain from all appearance of evil. Faithfulness to light received, and a sincere endeavour to conform to the means prescribed in the word of God, with an humble application to the blood of sprinkling, and the promised Spirit, will undoubtedly be answered by increasing measures of light, faith, strength, and comfort; and we shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord.

I need not tell your Lordship that I am an extempore writer. I dropt the consideration of whom I was addressing from the first paragraph; but I now return, and subscribe myself, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER III.

April – 1770.

MY LORD,

I HAVE a desire to fill the paper, and must therefore betake myself to the expedient I lately mentioned. Glorious things are spoken of the city of God, or (as I suppose) the state of glory, in Rev. xxi. from verse 10. *ad finem*. The description is doubtless mystical, and, perhaps, nothing short of a happy experience and participation will furnish an adequate exposition. One expression, in particular, has, I believe, puzzled wiser heads than mine to explain. “The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.” The construction likewise in the Greek is difficult. Some render it *pure gold transparent as glass*: this is the sense, but then it should be neuter, to agree with *Xovfftov*. If our reading is right, we must understand it either of gold pure, bright, and perspicuous as the finest transparent glass (for all glass is not transparent); or else, as two distinct comparisons, splendid and durable as the purest gold, clear and transparent as the finest glass. In that happy world the beauties and advantages which here are divided and incompatible, will unite and agree. Our glass is clear, but brittle; our gold is shining and solid, but it is opaque, and discovers only a surface. And thus it is with our minds. The powers of the imagination are lively and extensive, but transient and uncertain. The powers of the understanding are more solid and regular, but at the same time more slow and limited, and confined to the outside properties of the few objects around us. But when we arrive within the veil, the perfections of the glass and the gold will be combined, and the imperfections of each will entirely cease. Then we shall know more than we can now imagine. The glass will be all gold. And then we shall apprehend truth in its relations and consequences; not (as at present) by that tedious and fallible process which we call reasoning, but by a single glance of thought, as the sight pierces in an instant through the largest transparent bodies. The gold will be all glass.

I do not offer this as the sense of the passage, but as a thought which once occurred to me while reading it. I daily groan under a desultory, ungovernable imagination, and a palpable darkness of understanding, which greatly impede me in my attempts to contemplate the truths of God. Perhaps these complaints, in a greater or less degree, are common to all our fallen race, and exhibit mournful proofs that our nature is essentially depraved. The grace of God affords some assistance for correcting the wildness of the fancy, and enlarging the capacity of the mind: yet the cure at present is but

palliative; but ere long it shall be perfect, and our complaints shall cease for ever. Now it costs us much pains to acquire a pittance of solid and useful knowledge; and the ideas *we* have collected are far from being at the disposal of judgment, and, like men in a crowd, are perpetually clashing and interfering with each other. But it will not be so, when we are completely freed from the effects of sin. Confusion and darkness will not follow us into the world where light and order reign. Then, and not till then, our knowledge will be perfect, and our possession of it uninterrupted and secure.

Since the radical powders of the soul are thus enfeebled and disordered, it is not to be wondered at, that the best of men, and under their highest attainments, have found cause to make the acknowledgement of the apostle, “When I would do good, evil is present with me.” But, blessed be God, though we must feel hourly cause for shame and humiliation for what we are in ourselves, we have cause to rejoice continually in Christ Jesus, who, as he is revealed to us under the various names, characters, relations, and offices, which he bears in the scriptures, holds out to our faith a balm for every wound, a cordial for every discouragement, and a sufficient answer to every objection which sin or Satan can suggest against our peace. If we are guilty, he is our righteousness; if we are sick, he is our infallible physician; if we are weak, helpless, and defenceless, he is the compassionate and faithful shepherd, who has taken charge of us, and will not suffer anything to disappoint our hopes, or to separate us from his love. He knows our frame, he remembers that we are but dust, and has engaged to guide us by his counsel, support us by his power, and at length to receive us to his glory, that we may be with him for ever.

I am, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER IV.

February – 1772.

MY LORD,

I HAVE been sitting, perhaps a quarter of an hour, with my pen in my hand, and my finger upon my upper lip, contriving how I should begin my letter. A detail of the confused, incoherent thoughts which have successively passed through my mind, would have more than filled the sheet; but your Lordship's patience, and even your charity for the writer, would have been tried to the uttermost, if I could have penned them all down. At length my suspense reminded me of the apostle's words, Gal. v. 17. "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." This is a humbling, but a just account of a Christian's attainments in the present life, and is equally applicable to the strongest and to the weakest. The weakest need not say less, the strongest will hardly venture to say more. The Lord has given his people a desire and will aiming at great things: without this they would be unworthy the name of Christians; but they cannot do as they would. Their best desires are weak and ineffectual, not absolutely so (for he who works in them to will, enables them in a measure to do likewise), but in comparison with the mark at which they aim. So that while they have great cause to be thankful for the desire he has given them, and for the degree in which it is answered, they have equal reason to be ashamed and abased under a sense of their continual defects, and the evil mixtures which taint and debase their best endeavours. It would be easy to make out a long list of particulars which a believer would do if he could, but in which, from first to last, he finds a mortifying inability. Permit me to mention a few, which I need not transcribe from books, for they are always present to my mind.

He would willingly enjoy God in prayer. He knows that prayer is his duty; but, in his judgment, he considers it likewise as his greatest honour and privilege. In this light he can recommend it to others, and can tell them of the wonderful condescension of the great God, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven, that he should stoop so much lower, to afford his gracious ear to the supplications of sinful worms upon earth. He can bid them expect a pleasure in waiting upon the Lord, different in kind, and greater in degree, than all that the world can afford. By prayer, he can say, You have liberty to cast all your cares upon him that careth for you. By one hour's intimate access to the throne of grace, where the Lord causes his glory to pass before the soul that seeks him, you may acquire more true spiritual knowledge and comfort, than by a day or a week's converse with the

best of men, or the most studious perusal of many folios: and in this light he would consider it and improve it for himself. But, alas! how seldom can he do as he would! How often does he find this privilege a mere task, which he would be glad of a just excuse to omit! and the chief pleasure he derives from the performance, is to think that his task is finished: he has been drawing near to God with his lips, while his heart was far from him. Surely this is not doing as he would, when (to borrow the expression of an old woman here) he is dragged before God like a slave, and comes away like a thief.

The like may be said of reading the scriptures. He believes them to be the word of God; he admires the wisdom and grace of the doctrines, the beauty of the precepts, the richness and suitableness of the promises; and therefore, with David, he accounts it preferable to thousands of gold and silver, and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb. Yet while he thus thinks of it, and desires that it may dwell in him richly, and be his meditation night and day, he cannot do as he would. It will require some resolution to persist in reading a portion of it every day; and even then his heart is often less engaged than when reading a pamphlet. Here again his privilege frequently dwindles into a task. His appetite is vitiated, so that he has but little relish for the food of his soul.

He would willingly have abiding, admiring thoughts of the person and love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Glad is he, indeed, of those occasions which recall the Saviour to his mind; and, with this view, notwithstanding all discouragements, he perseveres in attempting to pray and read, and waits upon ordinances. Yet he cannot do as he would. Whatever claims he may have to the exercise of gratitude and sensibility towards his fellow-creatures, he must confess himself mournfully ungrateful and insensible towards his best Friend and Benefactor. Ah! what trifles are capable of shutting Him out of our thoughts, of whom we say, he is the beloved of our souls, who loved us, and gave himself for us, and whom we have deliberately chosen as our chief good and portion. What can make us amends for the loss we suffer here? Yet surely if we could we would set him always before us; his love should be the delightful theme of our hearts,

From morn to noon, from noon to dewy eve.

But though we aim at this good, evil is present with us; we find we are renewed but in part, and have still cause to plead the Lord's promise, to take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh.

He would willingly acquiesce in all the dispensations of divine providence. He believes that all events are under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness, and shall surely issue in the glory of God and the good of those who fear him. He doubts not but the hairs of his head are all numbered;—that the blessings of every kind which he possesses were bestowed upon him, and are preserved to him, by the bounty and special favour of the Lord whom he serves;—that afflictions spring not out of the ground, but are fruits and tokens of divine love, no less than his comforts;—that there is a need-be, whenever for a season he is in heaviness. Of these principles he can no more doubt than of what he sees with his eyes, and there are seasons when he thinks they will prove sufficient to reconcile him to the sharpest trials. But often when he aims to apply them in an hour of present distress, he cannot do what he would. He feels a law in his members warring against the law in his mind; so that, in defiance of the clearest convictions, seeing as though he perceived not, he is ready to complain, murmur, and despond. Alas! how vain is man in his best estate! How much weakness and inconsistency, even in those whose hearts are right with the Lord! And what reason have we to confess that we are unworthy, unprofitable servants!

It were easy to enlarge in this way, would paper and time permit. But, blessed be God, we are not under the law, but under grace; and even these distressing effects of the remnants of indwelling sin are over-ruled for good. By these experiences the believer is weaned more from self, and taught more highly to prize and more absolutely to rely on him, who is appointed unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more precious he will be to us; and a deep, repeated sense of the evil of our hearts is necessary to preclude all boasting, and to make us willing to give the whole glory of our salvation where it is due. Again, a sense of these evils will, when hardly anything else can do it, reconcile us to the thoughts of death, yea make us desirous to depart that we may sin no more, since we find depravity so deep rooted in our nature, that, like the leprous house, the whole fabric must be taken down before we can be freed from its defilement. Then, and not till then, we shall be able to do the thing that we would: when we see Jesus we shall be transformed into his image, and have done with sin and sorrow for ever.

I am, with great deference, &c.

LETTER V.

March – 1772.

MY LORD,

I THINK my last letter turned upon the apostle's thought, Gal. v. 17. "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." In the parallel place, Rom. vii. 19, there is another clause subjoined, "The evil which I would not, that I do." This, added to the former, would complete the dark side of my experience. Permit me to tell your Lordship a little part (for some things must not, cannot be told,) not of what I have read, but of what I have felt, in illustration of this passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and worse imaginations, but this evil is present with me; my heart is like a highway, like a city without walls or gates. Nothing so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid, but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place; neither the study, the pulpit, nor even the Lord's table, exempt me from their intrusion. I sometimes compare my words to the treble of an instrument, which my thoughts accompany with a kind of bass, or rather anti-bass, in which every rule of harmony is broken, every possible combination of discord and confusion is introduced, utterly inconsistent with, and contradictory to, the intended melody. Ah! what music would my praying and preaching often make in the ear of the Lord of Hosts, if he listened to them as they are mine only! By men, the upper part only (if I may so speak) is heard; and small cause there is for self-gratulation, if they should happen to commend, when conscience tells me they would be struck with astonishment and abhorrence could they hear the whole.

But if this awful effect of heart-depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature, yet at least I would not allow and indulge it; yet this I find I do. In defiance of my best judgment and best wishes, I find something within me which cherishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to start and flee, as I should if a toad or a serpent was put in my food or in my bed. Ah! how vile must the heart, at least my heart, be, that can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency? Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, without the least affectation of humility (however fair his outward conduct appears), subscribe himself less than the least of all saints, and of sinners the very chief.

I would not be influenced by a principle of self on any occasion; yet this evil I often do. I see the baseness and absurdity of such conduct as clearly as

I see the light of the day. I do not affect to be thought ten feet high, and I know that a desire of being thought wise or good is equally contrary to reason and truth. I should be grieved or angry if my fellow-creatures supposed I had such a desire; and therefore I fear the very principle of self, of which I complain, has a considerable share in prompting my desires to conceal it. The pride of others often offends me, and makes me studious to hide my own, because their good opinion of me depends much upon their not perceiving it. But the Lord knows how this dead fly taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than specious sins.

I would not indulge vain reasonings concerning the counsels, ways, and providence of God, yet I am prone to do it. That the Judge of all the earth will do right, is to me as evident and necessary as that two and two make four. I believe that he has a sovereign right to do what he will with his own, and that his sovereignty is but another name for the unlimited exercise of wisdom and goodness. But my reasonings are often such as if I had never heard of these principles, or had formally renounced them. I feel the workings of a presumptuous spirit, that would account for everything, and venture to dispute whatever it cannot comprehend. What an evil is this, for a potsherd of the earth to contend with its maker! I do not act thus towards my fellow-creatures; I do not find fault with the decisions of a judge, or the dispositions of a general, because, though I know they are fallible, yet I suppose they are wiser in their respective departments than myself. But I am often ready to take this liberty when it is most unreasonable and inexcusable.

I would not cleave to a covenant of works. It should seem from the foregoing particulars, and many others which I could mention, that I have reasons enough to deter me from this: yet even this I do. Not but that I say, and I hope from my heart, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." I embrace it as a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; and it is the main pleasure and business of my life to set forth the necessity and all-sufficiency of the Mediator between God and man, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his only. But here, as in everything else, I find a vast difference between my judgment and my experience. I am invited to take the water of life freely, yet I am often discouraged, because I have nothing wherewith to pay for it. If I am at times favoured with some liberty from the above mentioned evils, it rather gives me a more favourable opinion of myself than increases my admiration of the Lord's goodness to so unworthy a creature; and when the returning tide of my corruptions convinces me that I am still the same,

an unbelieving legal spirit would urge me to conclude that the Lord is changed: at least, I feel a weariness of being beholden to him for such continued multiplied forgiveness, and I fear that some part of my striving against sin, and my desires after an increase of sanctification arise from a secret wish that I might not be so absolutely and entirely indebted to him.

This, my Lord, is only a faint sketch of my heart, but it is taken from the life: it would require a volume rather than a letter to fill up the outlines. But I believe you will not regret that I choose to say no more upon such a subject. But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible Physician. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.

I remain, my Lord, &c.

LETTER VI.

April – 1772.

MY LORD,

MY TWO last letters turned upon a mournful subject, the depravity of the heart, which impedes us when we would do good, and pollutes our best intended services with evil. We have cause, upon this account, to go softly all our days; yet we need not sorrow as those who have no hope. The Lord has provided his people relief under those complaints, and teaches us to draw improvement from them. If the evils we feel were not capable of being overruled for good, he would not permit them to remain in us. This we may infer from his hatred to sin, and the love which he bears to his people.

As to the remedy, neither our state nor his honour are affected by the workings of indwelling sin, in the hearts of those whom he has taught to wrestle, strive, and mourn, on account of what they feel. Though sin wars, it shall not reign: and though it breaks our peace, it cannot separate from his love. Nor is it inconsistent with his holiness and perfection, to manifest his favour to such poor defiled creatures, or to admit them to communion with himself; for they are not considered as in themselves, but as one with Jesus, to whom they have fled for refuge, and by whom they live a life of faith. They are accepted in the Beloved, they have an Advocate with the Father, who once made an atonement for their sins, and ever lives to make intercession for their persons. Though they cannot fulfil the law, he has fulfilled it for them; though the obedience of the members is defiled and imperfect, the obedience of the Head is spotless and complete; and though there is much evil in them, there is something good, the fruit of his own gracious Spirit. They act from a principle of love, they aim at no less than his glory, and their habitual desires are supremely fixed upon himself. There is a difference in kind between the feeblest efforts of faith in a real believer, while he is covered with shame at the thought of his miscarriages, and the highest and most specious attainments of those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Nor shall this conflict remain long, or the enemy finally prevail over them. They are supported by almighty power, and led on to certain victory. They shall not always be as they are now; yet a little while, and they shall be freed from this vile body, which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down. Then they shall see Jesus as he is, and be like him, and with him for ever.

The gracious purposes to which the Lord makes the sense and feeling of our depravity subservient, are manifold. Hereby his own power, wisdom,

faithfulness, and love, are more signally displayed: His power,—in maintaining his own work in the midst of much opposition, like a spark burning in the water, or a bush unconsumed in the flames: His wisdom,—in defeating and controlling all the devices which Satan, from his knowledge of the evil of our nature, is encouraged to practise against us. He has overthrown many a fair professor, and, like Goliath, he challenges the whole army of Israel; yet he finds there are some against whom, though he thrusts sorely he cannot prevail; notwithstanding any seeming advantage he gains at some seasons, they are still delivered, for the Lord is on their side. The unchangeableness of the Lord's love, and the riches of his mercy, are likewise more illustrated by the multiplied pardons he bestows upon his people, than if they needed no forgiveness at all.

Hereby the Lord Jesus Christ is more endeared to the soul; all boasting is effectually excluded, and the glory of a full and free salvation is ascribed to him alone. If a mariner is surprised by a storm, and after one night spent in jeopardy, is presently brought safe into port; though he may rejoice in his deliverance, it will not affect him so sensibly, as if, after being tempest-tossed for a long season, and experiencing a great number and variety of hair-breadth escapes, he at last gains the desired haven. The righteous are said to be scarcely saved, not with respect to the certainty of the event, for the purpose of God in their favour cannot be disappointed, but in respect of their own apprehensions, and the great difficulties they are brought through. But when, after a long experience of their own deceitful hearts, after repeated proofs of their weakness, wilfulness, ingratitude, and insensibility, they find that none of these things can separate them from the love of God in Christ, Jesus becomes more and more precious to their souls. They love much, because much has been forgiven them. They dare not, they will not, ascribe anything to themselves, but are glad to acknowledge, that they must have perished, if possible, a thousand times over, if Jesus had not been their Saviour, their shepherd, and their shield. When they were wandering, he brought them back; when fallen, he raised them; when wounded, he healed them; when fainting, he revived them. By him out of weakness they have been made strong; he has taught their hands to war, and covered their heads in the day of battle. In a word, some of the clearest proofs they have had of his excellence, have been occasioned by the mortifying proofs they have had of their own vileness. They would not have known as much of him, if they had not known so much of themselves.

Farther, a spirit of humiliation, which is both *decus et tutamen*, the strength and beauty of our profession, is greatly promoted by our feeling, as

well as reading, that when we would do good, evil is present with us. A broken and a contrite spirit is pleasing to the Lord: he has promised to dwell with those who have it; and experience shows, that the exercise of all our graces is in proportion to the humbling sense we have of the depravity of our nature. But that we are so totally depraved, is a truth which no one ever truly learned by being only told it. Indeed, if we could receive, and habitually maintain a right judgment of ourselves, by what is plainly declared in the scriptures, it would probably save us many a mournful hour; but experience is the Lord's school, and they who are taught by him usually learn, that they have no wisdom by the mistakes they make, and that they have no strength by the slips and falls they meet with. Every day draws forth some new corruption, which before was little observed, or at least discovers it in a stronger light than before. Thus, by degrees, they are weaned from leaning to any supposed wisdom, power, or goodness in themselves; they feel the truth of our Lord's words, "Without me ye can do nothing;" and the necessity of crying, with David, "O lead me and guide me, for thy name's sake." It is chiefly by this frame of mind that one Christian is differenced from another; for though it is an inward feeling, it has very observable outward effects, which are expressively intimated, Ezek. xvi. 63, "Thou shalt be dumb, and not open thy mouth, in the day when I am pacified towards thee, saith the Lord God." The knowledge of my full and free forgiveness, of thy innumerable backslidings and transgressions, shall make thee ashamed, and silence the unruly workings of thine heart. Thou shalt open thy mouth in praise; but thou shalt no more boast in thyself, or censure others, or repine at my dispensations. In these respects we are exceedingly prone to speak unadvisedly with our lips. But a sense of great unworthiness and much forgiveness checks these evils. Whoever is truly humbled will not be easily angry, will not be positive and rash, will be compassionate and tender to the infirmities of his fellow-sinners, knowing, that if there be a difference, it is grace that has made it, and that he has the seeds of every evil in his own heart; and, under all trials and afflictions, he will look to the hand of the Lord, and lay his mouth in the dust, acknowledging that he suffers much less than his iniquities have deserved. These are some of the advantages and good fruits which the Lord enables us to obtain from that bitter root indwelling sin.

I am, with deference, &c.

LETTER VII.

September – 1772.

MY LORD,

WEAK, unskilful, and unfaithful as I am in practice, the Lord has been pleased to give me some idea of what a Christian ought to be, and of what is actually attainable in the present life, by those whom he enables earnestly to aspire towards the prize of their high calling, They who are versed in mechanics can, from a knowledge of the combined powers of a complicated machine, make an exact calculation of what it is able to perform, and what resistance it can counteract; but who can compute the possible effects of that combination of principle and motives revealed in the gospel, upon a heart duly impressed with a sense of their importance and glory? When I was lately at Mr. Cox's museum, while I was fixing my attention upon some curious movements, imagining that I saw the whole of the artist's design, the person who showed it touched a little spring, and suddenly a thousand new and unexpected motions took place, and the whole piece seemed animated from the top to the bottom. I should have formed but a very imperfect judgment of it, had I seen no more than what I saw at first. I thought it might in some measure illustrate the vast difference that is observable amongst professors, even amongst those who are, it is to be hoped, sincere. There are persons, who appear to have a true knowledge, in part, of the nature of gospel religion, but seem not to be apprised of its properties, in their comprehension and extent. If they have attained to some hope of their acceptance, if they find at seasons some communion with God in the means of grace, if they are in measure delivered from the prevailing and corrupt customs of the world, they seem to be satisfied, as if they were possessed of all. These are indeed great things; *sed meliora latent*. The profession of too many, whose sincerity charity would be unwilling to impeach, is greatly blemished, notwithstanding their hopes and their occasional comforts, by the breakings forth of unsanctified tempers, and the indulgence of vain hopes, anxious cares, and selfish pursuits. Far, very far, am I from that unscriptural sentiment of sinless perfection in fallen man. To those who have a due sense of the spirituality and ground of the divine precepts, and of what passes in their own hearts, there will never be wanting causes of humiliation and self-abasement on the account of sin; yet still there is a liberty and privilege attainable by the gospel, beyond what is ordinarily thought of. Permit me to mention two or three particulars, in which those who have a holy ambition of aspiring to them shall not be altogether disappointed.

A delight in the Lord's all-sufficiency, to be satisfied in him as our present and eternal portion. This, in the sense in which I understand it, is not the effect of a present warm frame, but of a deeply-rooted and abiding principle, the habitual exercise of which is to be estimated by the comparative indifference with which other things are regarded. The soul, thus principled, is not at leisure to take or to seek satisfaction in anything but what has a known subserviency to this leading taste. Either the Lord is present, and then he is to be rejoiced in; or else he is absent, and then he is to be sought and waited for. They are to be pitied, who, if they are sometimes happy in the Lord, can at other times be happy without him, and rejoice in broken cisterns, when their spirits are at a distance from the fountain of living waters. I do not plead for an absolute indifference to temporal blessings: he gives us all things richly to enjoy, and a capacity of relishing them is his gift likewise; but then the consideration of his love in bestowing should exceedingly enhance the value, and a regard to his will should regulate their use. Nor can they all supply the want of that which we can only receive immediately from himself. This principle likewise moderates that inordinate fear and sorrow to which we are liable upon the prospect or the occurrence of great trials for which there is a sure support and resource provided in the all-sufficiency of infinite goodness and grace. What a privilege is this, to possess God in all things while we have them, and all things in God when they are taken from us.

An acquiescence in the Lord's will, founded in a persuasion of his wisdom, holiness, sovereignty, and goodness. This is one of the greatest privileges and brightest ornaments of our profession. So far as we attain to this, we are secure from disappointment. Our own limited views and short-sighted purposes and desires, may be, and will be often over-ruled, but then our main and leading desire, that the will of the Lord may be done, must be accomplished. How highly does it become us, both as creatures and as sinners, to submit to the appointments of our Maker! and how necessary is it to our peace! This great attainment is too often unthought of, and overlooked; we are prone to fix our attention upon the second causes and immediate instruments of events; forgetting that whatever befalls us is according to his purpose, and therefore must be right and seasonable in itself, and shall, in the issue, be productive of good. From hence arise impatience, resentment, and secret repinings, which are not only sinful, but tormenting; whereas, if all things are in his hand; if the very hairs of our head are numbered; if every event, great and small, is under the direction of his providence and purpose; and, if he has a wise, holy, and gracious end in view, to which every-

thing that happens is subordinate and subservient;—then we have nothing to do but, with patience and humility, to follow as he leads, and cheerfully to expect a happy issue. The path of present duty is marked out; and the concerns of the next and every succeeding hour are in his hands. How happy are they who can resign all to him, see his hand in every dispensation, and believe that he chooses better for them than they possibly could for themselves!

A single eye to his glory, as the ultimate scope of all our undertakings. The Lord can design nothing short of his own glory; nor should we. The constraining love of Christ has a direct and marvellous tendency, in proportion to the measure of faith, to mortify the corrupt principle, self, which, for a season, is the grand spring of our conduct, and by which we are too much biased after we know the Lord. But as grace prevails, self is renounced. We feel that we are not our own, that we are bought with a price; and that it is our duty, our honour, and our happiness, to be the servants of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To devote soul and body, every talent, power, and faculty, to the service of his cause and will; to let our light shine (in our several situations) to the praise of his grace; to place our highest joy in the contemplation of his adorable perfections; to rejoice even in tribulations and distresses, in reproaches and infirmities, if thereby the power of Christ may rest upon us, and be magnified in us; to be content, yea, glad to be nothing, that he may be all in all; to obey him, in opposition to the threats or solicitations of men; to trust him, though all outward appearances seem against us; to rejoice in him, though we should (as will sooner or later be the case) have nothing else to rejoice in; to live above the world, and to have our conversation in heaven, to be like the angels, finding our own pleasure in performing his. This, my Lord, is the prize, the mark of our high calling, to which we are encouraged, with a holy ambition, continually to aspire. It is true, we shall still fall short; we shall find, that when we would do good, evil will be present with us. But the attempt is glorious, and shall not be wholly in vain. He that gives us thus to will, will enable us to perform with growing success, and teach us to profit even by our mistakes and imperfections.

O blessed man! that thus fears the Lord, that delights in his word, and derives his principles, motives, maxims, and consolations, from that unfailing source of light and strength! He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf is always green, and fruit abundant. The wisdom that is above shall direct his plans, inspire his counsels; and the power of God shall guard him on every side, and prepare his way through every difficulty; he shall see mountains sink into plains, and streams spring up in the dry wil-

derness. The Lord's enemies will be his; and they may be permitted to fight against him, but they shall not prevail, for the Lord is with him to deliver him. The conduct of such a one, though in a narrow and retired sphere of life, is of more real excellence and importance, than the most splendid actions of kings and conquerors, which fill the annals of history, Prov. xvi. 32. And if the God whom he serves is pleased to place him in a more public light, his labours and cares will be amply compensated, by the superior opportunities afforded him of manifesting the power and reality of true religion, and promoting the good of mankind.

I hope I may say, that I desire to be thus entirely given up to the Lord; I am sure, I must say, that what I have written is far from being my actual experience. Alas! I might be condemned out of my own mouth, were the Lord strict to mark what is amiss. But, O the comfort! we are not under the law, but under grace. The gospel is a dispensation for sinners, and we have an advocate with the Father. There is the unshaken ground of hope; a reconciled Father, a prevailing advocate, a powerful shepherd, a compassionate friend, a Saviour, who is able and willing to save to the uttermost. He knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust: and he has opened for us a new and blood-besprinkled way of access to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

April – 1772.

MY LORD,

FOR FIVE or six weeks past, I have been a good deal indisposed. The ground of my complaint was a cold, attended with a slight fever, and for some time with a cough, which made me feel some inconvenience in preaching. To this succeeded a deafness, so great as to cut me off from conversation; for I could not hear the sound of a voice, unless it was spoken loud in my ear. But the Lord has mercifully removed the fever and cough, opened my ears, and I am now nearly as well as usual. I had cause to be thankful, especially for two things, under this dispensation: First, that I was enabled, though sometimes with a little difficulty, to go on with my public work. It is a singular favour I have to acknowledge, that for the space of almost nine years, since I have been in the ministry, our sabbath and weekly opportunities have not been once suspended; whereas I have seen many of the Lord's servants laid by for a considerable space within that time. My other great mercy was, that the Lord was pleased to preserve me in a peaceful resigned frame; so that, when I was deaf, and could not be certain that I should recover my hearing any more, I was in general as cheerful and easy as at other times. This was the effect of his goodness: for though I know enough of his sovereignty, wisdom, and faithfulness, of his right to do what he pleases, and the certainty that he does all things well, to furnish me with arguments enough to prove that submission to his will is our absolute duty; yet I am sensible, that when the trial actually comes, notwithstanding all the advice I may have offered to others, I should myself toss like a wild bull in a net; rebel and repine; forget that I am a sinner, and that he is a sovereign: this, I say, would always and invariably be the case, unless he was graciously pleased to fulfil his word, that strength shall be according to the day. I hope my deafness has been instructive to me. The exercise of our senses is so easily and constantly performed, that it seems a thing of course; but I was then reminded how precarious the tenure is by which we hold those blessings which seem most our own, and which are most immediately necessary to the comfortable enjoyment of life. Outward senses, mental faculties, health of body, and peace of mind, are extremely valuable; but the continuance of them for a single moment depends upon him, who, if he opens, none can shut, and when he shuts, none can open. A minute is more than sufficient to deprive us of what we hold most dear, or to prevent us from deriving the least comfort from it, if it is not taken away. I am not presuming to give

your Lordship information; but only mentioning the thoughts that were much upon my mind while I was incapable of conversation. These are indeed plain and obvious truths, which I have long acknowledged as indisputable; but I have reason to be thankful when the Lord impresses them with fresh power upon my heart, even though he sees fit to do it through the medium of afflictions. I have seen, of late, something of the weight and importance of that admonition, Jer. ix. 23, 24; a passage which, though addressed to the wise, the mighty, and the rich, is of universal application; for self, unless corrected and mortified by grace, will find something whereof to glory, in the meanest characters and the lowest situations. And indeed, when things come to be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, the lunatics in bedlam, some of whom glory in their straw or their chains, as marks of splendour or ensigns of royalty, have as much reason on their side as any persons upon earth who glory in themselves. This alone is the proper ground of glory and joy, if we know the Lord. Then all is safe at present, and all will be happy for ever. Then, whatever changes may affect our temporal concernments, our best interests and hopes are secured beyond the reach of change; and whatever we may lose or suffer during this little span of time, will be abundantly compensated in that glorious state of eternity, which is just at hand.

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

December – 1772.

MY LORD,

I LATELY employed some of my leisure hours (which, when I am not indolent, are but few) in reading the Memoirs of the duke of Sully, which occasionally came in my way. It afforded me matter for variety of reflections. I pity the duke of Sully, whose attachment to the name of Protestant seems to have been little more than a point of honour, who drew all his resources from himself, and whose chief aim seems to have been, to approve himself faithful to an earthly master. He acted well as could be expected from natural principles; and the Lord, who employed him as an instrument in his providence, rewarded his fidelity with success, honour, and riches: a reward which, though in itself a poor one, is suited to the desires of men who place their happiness in worldly things, and is so far a compensation of their services. It is given to your Lordship to act from nobler principles, and with more enlarged views. You serve a Master, of whose favour, protection, and assistance you cannot be deprived, who will not overlook or misconstrue the smallest services you attempt for him, who will listen to no insinuations against you, who is always near, to comfort, direct, and strengthen you, and who is preparing for you such honours and blessings as he only can give, an inheritance (the reverse of all earthly good) “*incorruptible, undefiled, unfading.*”

Thus animated, and thus supported, assisted likewise by the prayers of thousands, may we not warrantably hope that your Lordship will be an instrument of great good, and that both church and state will be benefited by your example, counsels, and care.

In another view, the duke of Sully’s history exhibits a comment upon the psalmist’s words, “Surely man in his best estate is altogether vanity.” View him in one light, he seems to have possessed all that the most aspiring mind could aim at—the favour and confidence of his prince, accumulated wealth, great honours, and such powers by his offices and influence with the king, that he could almost do what he pleased. Yet he had so much to suffer from the fatigues and difficulties of his station, and the cabals and malice of his enemies, that, in the midst of all his grandeur, a dispassionate mind would rather pity than envy him. And how suddenly were his schemes broken by the death of the king? Then he lost his friend, his protector, his influence. The remainder of his days were embittered by many inquietudes. He lived indeed, if that could afford any consolation, in much state and pageantry

afterwards; but after having toiled through more than fourscore years, died at last almost of a broken heart, from domestic uneasiness. And is this all that the world can do for those who are accounted most successful? Alas!

Too low they build who build below the skies,

And what a picture of the instability of human things have we in his master, Henry! Admired, beloved, dreaded, full of vast designs fondly supposing himself born to be the arbiter of Europe, in an awful moment, and in the midst of his friends, suddenly struck from the height of his grandeur, and snatched into the invisible, unchangeable world. In that moment all his thoughts perished.

How unspeakably awful such a transition! How remarkable were his own forebodings of the approaching hour! O Lord, how dost thou pour contempt upon princes, and teach us that the great and the mean are equally in thy hands, and at thy disposal, as clay in the hands of the potter! Poor king! while he expected obedience to his own commands, he lived in habitual defiance of the commands of God. Men may respect his memory, for his sincerity, benevolence, and other amiable qualities; but, besides, that he was engrossed by a round of sensual pleasure (when business of state did not interfere), his life was stained with adultery. Happy, if, in the hours he spent in retirement, when the pre-intimation of his death hung heavy upon his mind, the Lord humbled and softened his heart, and gave him repentance unto life! I wish the history afforded a proof of this. However, in his death, we see an affecting proof, that no human dignity or power can ward off the stroke of the Almighty, who by such sudden and unexpected dispensations often shows himself terrible to the princes and great men of the earth. O! that they could see his hand, and wisely consider his doing in them!

But happy is the man who fears the Lord, and delights in his commandments: who sets God always before him, and acts under the constraining influence of redeeming love. He is the real friend, and the best champion of his country, who makes not the vague notions of human wisdom and honour, but the precepts and example of the blessed Jesus, the model and the motive of his conduct. He inculcates, as occasion offers, the great truths of religion in his conversation, and demonstrates them by his practice; yet the best part of his life is known only to God and himself. His time is divided between serving his country in public, and wrestling for it in private. Nor shall his labours or his prayers be lost. Either he shall have the desire of his heart, and shall see the religion and the liberty he so highly values transmit-

ted to posterity; or, if he should live when wrath is decreed, and there is no remedy, the promise and the providence of God shall seal him as the peculiar charge of angels, in the midst of public calamity. And when all things are involved in confusion, when the hearts of the wicked shall shake like the leaves of the forest, he shall be kept in perfect peace, trusting in the Lord.

I am, with the greatest deference, &c.

LETTER X.

March – 1773.

MY LORD,

USUALLY for some days before I purpose writing to your Lordship my thoughts are upon the stretch for a subject; I do not mean all day long, but it is so more or less: but I might as well spare my inquiries, I can come to no determination, and, for the most part, begin to write at an absolute uncertainty how I am to proceed. Since I cannot premeditate, my heart prays that it may be given me in the same hour what I shall offer. A simple dependence upon the teaching and influence of the good Spirit of God, so as not to supersede the use of appointed means, would if it could be uniformly maintained, make every part of duty easy and successful. It would free us from much solicitude, and prevent many mistakes. Methinks I have a subject in view already, a subject of great importance to myself, and which, perhaps, will not be displeasing to your Lordship, viz. how to walk with God in the daily occurrences of life, so as to do everything for his sake and by his strength.

When we are justified by faith, and accepted in the Beloved, we become heirs of everlasting life: but we cannot know the full value of our privileges till we enter upon the state of glory. For this, most who are converted, have to wait some time after they are partakers of grace. Though the Lord loves them, hates sin, and teaches them to hate it, he appoints them to remain a while in a sinful world, and to groan under the burden of a depraved nature. He could put them in immediate possession of the heaven for which he has given them a meetness, but he does not. He has a service for them here, an honour which is worth all they can suffer, and for which of eternity will not afford an opportunity, namely, to be instruments of promoting his designs and manifesting his grace in the world. Strictly speaking, this is the whole of our business here, the only reason why life is prolonged, or for which it is truly desirable, that we may fill up our connections and situations, improve our comforts and our crosses, in such a manner as that God may be glorified in us and by us. As he is a bountiful Master and a kind Father, he is pleased to afford a variety of temporal blessings, which sweeten our service, and as coming from his hand are very valuable, but are by no means worth living for, considered in themselves, as they can neither satisfy our desires, nor preserve us from trouble or support us under it. That light of God's countenance which can pervade the walls and dissipate the gloom of a dungeon, is unspeakably preferable to all that can be enjoyed in a palace without it. The

true end of life is, to live not to ourselves, but to him who died for us; and while we devote ourselves to his service upon earth, to rejoice in the prospect of being happy with him for ever in heaven. These things are generally known and acknowledged by professors; but they are a favoured few who act consistently with their avowed principles; who honestly, diligently, and without reserve, endeavour to make the most of their talents and strength in promoting the Lord's service, and allow themselves in no views or designs, but what are plainly subordinate and subservient to it. Yea, I believe, the best of the Lord's servants see cause enough to confess, that they are not only unprofitable in comparison of what they wish to be, but in many instances unfaithful likewise. They find so many snares, hindrances, and temptations from without, and so much embarrassment from sin which dwells within, that they have more cause for humiliation than self-complacency, when they seem most earnest and most useful. However, we have no scriptural evidence that we serve the Lord at all, any further than we find an habitual desire and aim to serve him wholly. He is gracious to our imperfections and weakness; yet he requires all the heart, and will not be served by halves, nor accept what is performed by a divided spirit. I lately met with some profane scoffs of Voltaire upon the sentiment of doing all to the glory of God (such as might be expected from such a man); however, this is the true alchemy which turns everything to gold, and ennobles the common actions of life into acts of religion, 1 Cor. x. 31. Nor is there a grain of real goodness in the most specious actions which are performed without a reference to God's glory. This the world cannot understand; but it will appear highly reasonable to those who take their ideas of God from the scriptures, and who have felt the necessity, and found the benefits of redemption. We are debtors many ways. The Lord has a right to us by creation, by redemption, by conquest, when he freed us from Satan's power, and took possession of our hearts by his grace; and lastly, by our own voluntary surrender in the day when he enabled us to fix our choice on himself, as our Lord and our portion. Then we felt the force of our obligations, we saw the beauty and honour of his service, and that nothing was worthy to stand in the least degree of competition with it. This is always equally true, though our perceptions of it are not always equally strong. But where it has been once really known, it cannot be wholly forgotten, or cease to be the governing principle of life; and the Lord has promised to revive the impression in those who wait upon him, and thereby to renew their strength. For in proportion as we feel by what ties we are his, we shall embrace his service as perfect freedom.

Again when the eye is thus single, the whole body will be full of light. The principle, of acting simply for God, will in general make the path of duty plain, solve a thousand otherwise dubious questions, lead to the most proper and obvious means, and preclude that painful anxiety about events, which upon no other plan can be avoided. The love of God is the best casuist; especially as it leads us to a careful attendance to his precepts, a reliance on his promises, and a submission to his will. Most of our perplexities arise from an undue, though perhaps unperceived, attachment to self. Either we have some scheme of our own too closely connected with our general view of serving the Lord, or lay some stress upon our own management, which, though we suspect it may possibly fail us, we cannot entirely help trusting to. In these respects, the Lord permits his servants occasionally to feel their own weakness; but if they are sincerely devoted to him, he will teach them to profit by it, and bring them by degrees to a simplicity of dependence, as well as of intention. Then all things are easy. Acting from love, and walking by faith, they can neither be disappointed nor discouraged. Duty is their part, care is his, and they are enabled to cast it upon him. They know that when their expedients seem to fail, he is still all-sufficient. They know that, being engaged in his cause they cannot miscarry; and that though in some things they may seem to fall short of success, they are sure of meeting acceptance, and that he will estimate their services, not by their actual effects, but according to the gracious principle and desire he has put into their hearts, 2 Chron. vi. 7. 8.

I am, with the greatest respect, &c.

LETTER XI.

June — 1773.

MY LORD,

MY OLD cast-off acquaintance, Horace, occasionally came in my way this morning. I opened it upon *lib. 3. od. 29.* Did I not know the proposal to be utterly impracticable, how gladly should I imitate it, and send your Lordship, in honest prose, if not in elegant verse, an invitation. But I must content myself with the idea of the pleasure it would give me to sit with you half a day under my favourite great tree, and converse with you, not concerning the comparatively petty affairs of human governments, but of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. How many delightful subjects would suggest themselves in a free and retired conversation! The excellency of our King, the permanency and glory of his kingdom, the beauty of his administration, the privileges of his subjects, the review of what he has done for us, and the prospect of what he has prepared for us in future; and if, while we were conversing, he should be pleased to join us (as he did the disciples when walking to Emmaus), how would our hearts burn within us! Indeed, whether we are alone, or in company, the most interesting topics strike us but faintly, unless he is pleased to afford his gracious influence; but when he is present, light, love, liberty, and joy, spring up in the hearts that know him. This reminds me (as I have mentioned Horace) to restore some beautiful lines to their proper application. They are impious and idolatrous as he uses them, but have an expressive propriety in the mouth of a believer:—

Lucem redde tuæ, dux bone, patriæ:
Instar veris enim vultus ubi tuus
Affulsit populo, gratior it dies,
Et soles melius nitent.

But we cannot meet. All that is left for me is to use the liberty you allow me of offering a few hints upon these subjects by letter, not because you know them not, but because you love them. The hour is coming when all impediments shall be removed. All distinctions shall cease that are founded upon sublunary things, and the earth and all its works shall be burnt up. Glorious day! May our souls be filled with the thought, and learn to estimate all things around us now by the view in which they will appear to us then! Then it will be of small moment who was the prince and who was the beggar in this life, but who, in their several situations, sought, and loved, and

feared, and honoured the Lord. Alas! how many of the kings of the earth, and the rich men and the chief captains, and the mighty men will then say, in vain, to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us!" In this world they are for the most part too busy to regard the commands of God, or too happy to seek his favour: they have their good things here; they please themselves for a while, and in a moment they go down to the grave. In that moment their thoughts perish, their schemes are left unfinished, they are torn from their possessions, and enter upon a new, an untried, an unchangeable, a never-ending state of existence. Alas! is this all the world can afford! I congratulate you, my Lord, not because God has appointed you to appear in an elevated rank (this, abstracted from the opportunity it affords you of greater usefulness, would perhaps be a more proper subject for condolence); but that he has admitted you to those honours and privileges which come from him only, and which so few in the superior ranks of life think worthy of their attention. I doubt not but you are often affected with a sense of this distinguishing mercy. But though we know that we are debtors, great debtors to the grace of God, which alone has made us to differ, we know it but imperfectly at present. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, nor can we form a just conception of the misery from which we are redeemed, much less of the price paid for our redemption. How little do we know of the Redeemer's dignity, and of the unutterable distress he endured when his soul was made an offering for sin, and it pleased the Father to bruise him, that by his stripes we might be healed. These things will strike us quite in another manner, when we view them in the light of eternity. Then, to return to the thought from which I have rambled, then and there I trust we shall meet to the highest advantage, and spend an everlasting day together in happiness and praise. With this thought I endeavour to comfort myself, under the regret I sometimes feel that I can have so little intercourse with you in this life.

May the cheering contemplation of the hope set before us, support and animate us to improve the interval and fill us with a holy ambition of shining as lights in the world, to the praise and glory of his grace who has called us out of darkness. Encompassed as we are with snares, temptations, and infirmities, it is possible, by his promised assistance, to live in some good measure above the world while we are in it; above the influence of its cares, its smiles, or its frowns. Our conversation, μ , our citizenship, is in heaven. We are not at home, but only resident here for a season, to fulfil an appointed service; and the Lord, whom we serve, has encouraged us to hope that he will guide us by his wisdom, strengthen us by his power, and com-

fort us with the light of his countenance, which is better than life. Every blessing we receive from him is a token of his favour, and a pledge of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory which he has reserved for us. O! to hear him say at last, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!” will be a rich amends for all that we can lose, suffer, or forbear, for his sake.

I subscribe myself, with great sincerity, &c.

LETTER XII.

February — 1774.

MY LORD,

THE FIRST line of Horace's epistle to Augustus, when rightly applied, suggests a grand and cheering idea. As addressed by the poet, nothing can be more blasphemous, idolatrous, and absurd; but with what comfort and propriety may a Christian look up to him to whom all power is committed in heaven and earth, and say, *Cum tot sustineas et tanta negotia solus!* Surely a more weighty and comprehensive sentence never dropped from an uninspired pen. And how beautifully and expressively is it closed by the word *solus!* the government is upon his shoulders: and though he is concealed by a veil of second causes from common eyes, so that they can perceive only the means, instruments, and contingencies by which he works, and therefore think he does nothing, yet in reality he does all, according to his own counsel and pleasure, in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.

Who can enumerate the *tot et tanta negotia*, which are incessantly before his eye, adjusted by his wisdom, dependent on his will, and regulated by his power, in his kingdoms of providence and grace? If we consider the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars which he has ordained; if we call in the assistance of astronomers and glasses, to help us in forming a conception of the number, distances, magnitudes, and motions of the heavenly bodies; the more we search, the more we shall be confirmed, that these are but a portion of his ways. But he calls them all by their names, upholds them by his power, and without his continual energy they would rush into confusion, or sink into nothing. If we speak of intelligences, he is the life, the joy, the sun of all that are capable of happiness. Whatever may be signified by the thrones, principalities, and powers in the world of light, they are all dependent upon his power, and obedient to his command; it is equally true of angels as of men, that without him they can do nothing. The powers of darkness are likewise under his subjection and control. Though but little is said of them in scripture, we read enough to assure us that their number must be immensely great, and that their strength, subtlety, and malice, are such, as we may tremble to think of them as our enemies, and probably should, but for our strange insensibility to whatever does not fall under the cognizance of our outward senses. But he holds them all in a chain, so that they can do or attempt nothing but by his permission; and whatever he

permits them to do (though they mean nothing less) has its appointed subserviency in accomplishing his designs.

But to come nearer home, and to speak of what seems more suited to our scanty apprehensions; still we may be lost in wonder. Before this blessed and only Potentate, all the nations of the earth are but as the dust upon the balance and the small drop of a bucket, and might be thought (if compared with the immensity of his works) scarcely worthy of his notice; yet here he presides, pervades, provides, protects, and rules. In him his creatures live, move, and have their being; from him is their food and preservation. The eyes of all are upon him; what he gives they gather, and can gather no more; and at his word they sink into the dust. There is not a worm that crawls upon the ground, or a flower that grows in the pathless wilderness, or a shell upon the sea-shore, but bears the impress of his wisdom, power, and goodness. With respect to men, he reigns with uncontrolled dominion over every kingdom, family, and individual. Here we may be astonished at his wisdom, in employing free agents, the greater part of whom are his enemies, to accomplish his purposes. But, however reluctant, they all serve him. His patience, likewise, is wonderful. Multitudes, yea nearly our whole species, spend the life and strength which he affords them, and abuse all the bounties he heaps upon them, in the ways of sin. His commands are disregarded, his name blasphemed, his mercy disdained, his power defied; yet still he spares. It is an eminent part of his government, to restrain the depravity of human nature, and in various ways to check its efforts which, if, left to itself, without his providential control, would presently make earth the very image of hell. For the vilest men are not suffered to perpetrate a thousandth part of the evil which their hearts would prompt them to. The earth, though lying in the wicked one, is filled with the goodness of the Lord. He preserved man and beast, sustains the young lions in the forest, feeds the birds of the air, which have neither store-house nor barn, and adorns the insects and the flowers of the field with a beauty and elegance, far beyond what can be found in the courts of kings.

Still more wonderful is his administration in his kingdom of grace. He is present with all his creatures, but in a peculiar manner with his own people. Each of these are monuments of a more illustrious display of power, than that which spread abroad the heavens like a curtain, and laid the foundations of the earth; for he finds them all in a state of rebellion and enmity, and makes them a willing people; and from the moment he reveals his love to them, he espouses their cause, and takes all their concerns into his own hands. He is near and attentive to every one of them, as if there was only

that one. This high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity, before whom the angels veil their faces, condescends to hold communion with those whom men despise. He sees not as man seeth—rides on a cloud, disdainful by a sultan or a czar, to manifest himself to a humble soul in a mud-walled cottage. He comforts them when in trouble, strengthens them when weak, makes their beds in sickness, revives them when fainting, upholds them when failing, and so seasonably and effectually manages for them, that though they are persecuted and tempted, though their enemies are many and mighty, nothing that they feel or fear is able to separate them from his love.

And all this he does *solus*. All the abilities, powers, and instincts, that are found amongst creatures, are emanations from his fulness. All changes, successes, disappointments, all that is memorable in the annals of history, all the risings and falls of empires, all the turns in human life, take place according to his plan. In vain men contrive and combine to accomplish their own counsels; unless they are parts of his counsel likewise, the efforts of their utmost strength and wisdom are crossed and reversed by the feeblest and most unthought-of circumstances. But when he has a work to accomplish, and his time is come, however inadequate and weak the means he employs may seem to a carnal eye, the success is infallibly secured; for all things serve him, and are in his hands as clay in the hands of the potter. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!

This is the God whom we adore. This is he who invites us to lean upon his almighty arm, and promises to guide us with his unerring eye. He says to you, my Lord, and even to me, “Fear not, I am with thee; be not dismayed. I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” Therefore, while in the path of duty, and following his call, we may cheerfully pass on, regardless of apparent difficulties; for the Lord, whose we are, and who has taught us to make his glory our highest end, will go before us, and at his word crooked things become straight, light shines out of darkness, and mountains sink into plains. Faith may, and must be exercised, experience must, and will confirm what his word declares, that the heart is deceitful, and that man in his best estate is vanity. But his promises to them that fear him shall be confirmed likewise, and they shall find him, in all situations, a sun, a shield, and an exceeding great reward.

I have lost another of my people, a mother unto our Israel; a person of much experience, eminent grace, wisdom, and usefulness. She walked with God forty years: she was one of the Lord’s poor; but her poverty was de-

cent, satisfied, and honourable; she lived respected, and her death is considered as a public loss. It is a great loss to me; I shall miss her advice and example, by which I have been often edified and animated. But Jesus still lives. Almost her last words were, The Lord is my portion, saith my soul.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

March 10 — 1774.

MY LORD,

FOR ABOUT six weeks past I have had occasion to spend several hours of almost every day with the sick and the dying. These scenes are to a minister like walking the hospitals to a young surgeon. The various cases which occur, exemplify, illustrate, and explain, with a commanding energy, many truths, which may be learned indeed at home, but cannot be so well understood, or their force so sensibly felt, without the advantage of experience and observation. As physicians, besides that competent general knowledge of their profession which should be common to them all, have usually their several favourite branches of study, some applying themselves more to botany, others to chemistry, others to anatomy; so ministers as their inclinations and gifts differ, are led more closely to consider some particular branch of the system of divine truth. Some are directed to state and defend the doctrines of the gospel; some have a talent for elucidating difficult texts of scripture; some have a turn for explaining the prophetic parts, and so of the rest. For myself, if it be lawful to speak of myself, and so far as I can judge, anatomy is my favourite branch; I mean the study of the human heart, with its workings and counter-workings, as it is differently affected in a state of nature or of grace in the different seasons of prosperity, adversity, conviction, temptation, sickness, and the approach of death. The Lord, by sending me hither, provided me a good school for these purposes. I know not where I could have had a better, or one affording a greater variety of characters, in proportion to the number of people; and as they are mostly poor people, and strangers to that address which is the result of education and converse with the world, there is a simplicity in what they say or do, which gives me a peculiar advantage in judging of their cases.

But I was about to speak of death. Though the grand evidence of those truths upon which our hopes are built, arises from the authority of God speaking them in his word, and revealing them by his Spirit, to the awakened heart (for till the heart is awakened it is incapable of receiving this evidence); yet some of these truths are so mysterious, so utterly repugnant to the judgment of depraved nature, that, through the remaining influence of unbelief and vain reasoning, the temptations of Satan, and the subtle arguments with which some men reputed wise, attack the foundations of our faith, the minds even of believers are sometimes capable of being shaken. I know no better corroborating evidence for the relief of the mind under such

assaults than the testimony of dying persons, especially of such as have lived out of the noise of controversy, and who perhaps never heard a syllable of what has been started in these evil days against the deity of Christ, his atonement, and other important articles. Permit me, my Lord, to relate, upon this occasion, some things which exceedingly struck me in the conversation I had with a young woman whom I visited in her last illness about two years ago. She was a sober, prudent person, of plain sense, could read her Bible, but had read little besides. Her knowledge of the world was nearly confined to the parish; for I suppose she was seldom, if ever, twelve miles from home in her life. She had known the gospel about seven years before the Lord visited her with a lingering consumption, which at length removed her to a better world. A few days before her death, I had been praying by her bed-side, and in my prayer, I thanked the Lord, that he gave her now to see that she had not followed cunningly-devised fables. When I had finished, she repeated that word, "No," she said "not cunningly-devised fables; these are realities indeed: I feel their truth, I feel their comfort. O, tell my friends, tell my acquaintance, tell enquiring souls, tell poor sinners, tell all the daughters of Jerusalem (alluding to Solomon's Song, v. 16. from which she had just before desired me to preach at her funeral), what Jesus has done for my soul. Tell them that now in the time of need I find him my beloved and my friend, and as such I commend him to them." She then fixed her eyes steadfastly upon me, and proceeded, as well as I can recollect, as follows: "Sir, you are highly favoured in being called to preach the gospel. I have often heard you with pleasure; but give me leave to tell you, that I now see all you have said, or can say, is comparatively but little. Nor till you come into my situation, and have death and eternity full in your view, will it be possible for you to conceive the vast weight and importance of the truths you declare. Oh! Sir, it is a serious thing to die; no words can express what is needful to support the soul in the solemnity of a dying hour."

I believe it was the next day when I visited her again. After some discourse, as usual, she said, with a remarkable vehemence of speech, "Are you sure I cannot be mistaken?" I answered, without hesitation, Yes, I am sure; I am not afraid to say, my soul for your's that you are right. She paused a little, and then replied, "You say true, I know I am right. I feel that my hope is fixed upon the Rock of ages; I know in whom I have believed. Yet if you could see with my eyes, you would not wonder at my question. But the approach of death presents a prospect, which is till then hidden from us, and which cannot be described." She said much more to the same purpose; and in all she spoke there was a dignity, weight, and evidence which I

suppose few professors of divinity, when lecturing from the chair, have at any time equalled. We may well say, with Elihu, "Who teacheth like him?" Many instances of the like kind I have met with here. I have a poor girl near me who looks like an idiot, and her natural capacity is indeed very small, but the Lord has been pleased to make her acquainted alternately with great temptations and proportionably great discoveries of his love and truth. Sometimes, when her heart is enlarged, I listen to her with astonishment. I think no books or ministers I ever met with have given me such an impression and understanding of what the apostle styles "the deep things of God," as I have upon some occasions received from her conversation.

But I am rambling again. My attendance upon the sick is not always equally comfortable, but, could I learn aright, it might be equally instructive. Some confirm the preciousness of a Saviour to me, by the cheerfulness with which, through faith in his name, they meet the king of terrors. Others no less confirm it, by the terror and reluctance they discover when they find they must die; for though there are too many who sadly slight the blessed gospel while they are in health, yet in this place most are too far enlightened to be quite thoughtless about their souls, if they retain their senses in their last illness. Then, like the foolish virgins, they say, "Give us of your oil." Then they are willing that ministers and professors should pray with them and speak to them. Through the Lord's goodness, several whom I have visited in these circumstances have afforded me good hope; they have been savingly changed by his blessing upon what has passed at the eleventh hour. I have seen a marvellous and blessed change take place in their language, views, and tempers, in a few days. I now visit a young person, who is cut short in her nineteenth year by a consumption, and I think cannot live many days. I found her very ignorant and insensible, and she remained so a good while; but of late I hope her heart is touched. She feels her lost state, she seems to have some right desires, she begins to pray, and in such a manner as I cannot but hope the Lord is teaching her, and will reveal himself to her before she departs. But it is sometimes otherwise. I saw a young woman die last week. I had been often with her; but the night she was removed she could only say, "O, I cannot live, I cannot live!" She repeated this mournful complaint as long as she could speak; for, as the vital powers were more oppressed, her voice was changed into groans; her groans grew fainter and fainter, and, in about a quarter of an hour after she had done speaking, she expired. Poor thing, I thought, as I stood by her bed-side, if you were a duchess, in this situation, what could the world do for you now! I thought likewise how many things are there that now give us pleasure or pain, and

assume a mighty importance in our view, which, in a dying hour, will be no more to us than the clouds which fly unnoticed over our heads. Then the truth of our Lord's aphorism will be seen, felt, and acknowledged, "One thing is needful;" and we shall be ready to apply Grotius's dying confession, to, alas! a great part of our lives! "I have lost a life in laborious trifling."

Your Lordship allows me to send unpremeditated letters. I need not assure you this is one.

I am &c.

LETTER XIV.

March 24 — 1774.

MY LORD,

WHAT a mercy is it to be separated in spirit, conversation, and interest from the world that knows not God! where all are alike by nature. Grace makes a happy and unspeakable difference. Believers were once under the same influence of that spirit who still worketh in the children of disobedience, pursuing different paths, but all equally remote from truth and peace; some hatching cockatrice eggs, others weaving spiders webs. These two general heads of mischief and vanity include all the schemes, aims, and achievements of which man is capable, till God is pleased to visit the heart with his grace. The busy part of mankind are employed in multiplying evils and miseries; the more retired, speculative, and curious are amusing themselves with what will hereafter appear as unsubstantial, unstable, and useless as a cobweb. Death will soon sweep away all that the philosophers, the virtuosi, the mathematicians, the antiquarians, and other learned triflers are now weaving with so much self-applauded address. Nor will the fine-spun dresses in which the moralist and the self-righteous clothe themselves, be of more advantage to them, either for ornament or defence, than the produce of a spider. But it is given to a few to know their present state and future destination. These build upon the immoveable rock of ages for eternity. These are trees springing from a living root, and bear the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. These only are awake, while the rest of the world are in a sleep, indulging in vain dreams, from which likewise they will shortly awake; but, O, with what consternation, when they shall find themselves irrecoverably divorced from all their delusive attachments, and compelled to appear before that God to whom they have lived strangers, and to whom they must give an account! O for a thousand tongues to proclaim in the ears of thoughtless mortals that important aphorism of our Lord, “One thing is needful!” Yet a thousand tongues would be, and are employed in vain, unless so far as the Lord is pleased to send the watchman’s warning, by the power and agency of his own Spirit. I think the poet tells us, that Cassandra had the gift of truly foretelling future events; but she was afterwards laid under a painful embarrassment, that nobody should believe her words. Such, with respect to the bulk of their auditories, is the lot of gospel-ministers: they are enlightened to see, and sent forth to declare, the awful consequences of sin; but, alas! how few believe their report! To illustrate our grief and disappointment, I

sometimes suppose a dangerous water to be in the way of travellers, over which there is a bridge, which those who can be prevailed upon may pass with safety. By the side of this bridge watchmen are placed, to warn passengers of the danger of the waters; to assure them, that all who attempt to go through them must inevitably perish; to invite, entreat, and beseech them, if they value their lives, to cross the bridge. Methinks this should be an easy task: yet if we should see in fact the greater part stopping their ears to the friendly importunity; many so much offended by it, as to account the watchman's care impertinent, and only deserving of scorn and ill treatment; hardly one in fifty betaking themselves to the friendly bridge, the rest eagerly plunging into the waters, from which none return, as if they were determined to try who should be drowned first. This spectacle would be no unfit emblem of the reception the gospel meets with from a blinded world. The ministers are rejected, opposed, vilified; they are accounted troublers of the world, because they dare not, cannot stand silent, while sinners are perishing before their eyes: and if, in the course of many sermons, they can prevail but on one soul to take timely warning, and to seek to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, they may account it a mercy and an honour, sufficient to overbalance all the labour and reproaches they are called to endure. From the most they must expect no better reception than the Jews gave to Jeremiah, who told the prophet to his face, "As to the word thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth." Surely, if the Lord has given us any sense of the worth of our souls, any compassion towards them, this must be a painful exercise; and experience must teach us something of the meaning of Jeremiah's pathetic exclamation, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears! that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people." It is our duty to be thus affected. Our relief lies in the wisdom and sovereignty of God. He reveals his salvation to whom he pleases, for the most part to babes; from the bulk of the wise and the prudent it is hidden. Thus it hath pleased him, and therefore it must be right. Yea, he will one day condescend to justify the propriety and equity of his proceedings to his creatures: then every mouth will be stopped, and none will be able to reply against his judge. Light is come into the world, but men prefer darkness. They hate the light, resist it, and rebel against it. It is true, all do so; and therefore, if all were to perish under the condemnation, their ruin would be their own act. It is of grace that any are saved, and in the distribution of that grace, he does what he will with his own; a right which most are ready enough to claim in their own

concerns, though they are so unwilling to allow it to the Lord of all. Many perplexing and acrimonious disputes have been started upon this subject; but the redeemed of the Lord are called, not to dispute, but to admire and rejoice; to love, adore, and obey. To know that he loved us, and gave himself for us, is the constraining argument and motive to love him, and surrender ourselves to him; to consider ourselves as no longer our own, but to devote ourselves, with every faculty, power, and talent to his service and glory. He deserves our all; for he parted with all for us. He made himself poor; he endured shame, torture, death, and the curse for us, that we, through him, might inherit everlasting life. Ah! the hardness of my heart, that I am no more affected, astonished, overpowered, with this thought!

I am, &c.

LETTER XV.

April 20, 1774.

MY LORD,

I HAVE been pondering a good while for a subject, and at last I begin without one, hoping that, as it has often happened, while I am writing one line, something will occur to fill up another. Indeed, I have an inexhaustible fund at hand; but it is to me often like a prize in the hand of a fool; I want skill to improve it. O for a warm, a suitable, a seasonable train of thought, that might enliven my own heart, and not be unworthy your Lordship's perusal! Methinks the poets can have but cold comfort, when they invoke a fabled Muse; but we have a warrant, a right, to look up for the influence of the Holy Spirit, who ordains strength for us, and has promised to work in us. What a comfort, what an honour is this, that worms have liberty to look up to God! and that He, the high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity, is pleased to look down upon us, to maintain our peace, to supply our wants, to guide us with his eye, to inspire us with wisdom and grace suitable to our occasions! They who profess to know something of this intercourse, and to depend upon it, are by the world accounted enthusiasts, who know not what they mean, or perhaps hypocrites, who pretend to what they have not, in order to cover some base designs. But we have reason to bear their reproaches with patience. Could the miser say,

—Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo
Ipse domi, simul ac nummos contemplor in arca.

Well, then, may the believer say, let them laugh, let them rage, let them, if they please, point at me for a fool, as I walk the streets; if I do but take up the Bible, or run over in my mind the inventory of the blessings with which the Lord has enriched me, I have sufficient amends. Jesus is mine; in him I have wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, an interest in all the promises, and in all the perfections of God; he will guide me by his counsel, support me by his power, comfort me with his presence, while I am here, and afterwards, when flesh and heart fail, he will receive me to his glory.

Let them say what they will, they shall not dispute or laugh us out of our spiritual senses. If all the blind men in the kingdom should endeavour to bear me down, that the sun is not bright, or that the rainbow has no colours, I would still believe my own eyes. I have seen them both, they have not. I cannot prove to their satisfaction what I assert, because they are destitute of

sight, the necessary medium; yet their exceptions produce no uncertainty in my mind; they would not, they could not hesitate a moment, if they were not blind. Just so, they who have been taught of God, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, have an experimental perception of the truth, which renders them proof against all the sophistry of infidels. I am persuaded we have many plain people here, who, if a wise man of the world was to suggest that the Bible is a human invention, would be quite at a loss how to answer him, by arguments drawn from external evidences; yet they have found such effects from this blessed book, that they would be no more moved by the insinuation, than if they were told, that a cunning man, or set of men, invented the sun, and placed it in the firmament. So if a wise Socinian was to tell them, that the Saviour was only a man like themselves, they would conceive just such an opinion of his skill in divinity, as a philosopher would do of a clown's skill in astronomy, who should affirm that the sun was no bigger than a cartwheel.

It remains therefore a truth, in defiance of all the cavils of the ignorant, that the Holy Spirit does influence the hearts of all the children of God, or, in other words, they are inspired, not with new revelations, but with grace and wisdom to understand, apply, and feed upon the great things already revealed in the scriptures, without which the scriptures are as useless as spectacles to the blind. Were it not so, when we become acquainted with the poverty, ignorance, and wickedness of our hearts, we must sit down in utter despair of being ever able to think a good thought, to offer a single petition aright in prayer, or to take one safe step in the path of life. But now we may be content with our proper weakness, since the power and spirit of Christ are engaged to rest upon us; and while we are preserved in a simple dependence upon this help, though unable of ourselves to do anything, we shall find an ability to do everything that our circumstances and duty call for. What is weaker than a worm? Yet the Lord's worms shall in his strength, thrash the mountains, and make the hills as chaff. But this life of faith, this living and acting by a power above our own, is an inexplicable mystery, till experience makes it plain. I have often wondered that St. Paul has obtained so much quarter at the hands of some people, as to pass with them for a man of sense; for surely the greatest part of his writings must be to the last degree absurd and unintelligible upon their principles. How many contradictions must they find, for instance, if they give any attention to what they read in that one passage, Gal. ii. 20, "I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I

now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

And as believers are thus inspired by the Holy Spirit, who furnishes them with desires, motives, and abilities, to perform what is agreeable to his will; so I apprehend, that they who live without God in the world, whom the apostle styles sensual, not having the Spirit, are in a greater or less degree *ad captum recipientis*, under what I may call a *black inspiration*. After making the best allowances I can, both for the extent of human genius and the deplorable evil of the human heart, I cannot suppose that one half of the wicked wit, of which some persons are so proud, is properly their own. Perhaps such a one as Voltaire would neither have written, nor have been read or admired so much, if he had not been the amanuensis of an abler hand in his own way. Satan is always near when the heart is disposed to receive him; and the Lord withdraws his restraints, to heighten the sinner’s ability of sinning with an eclat, and assisting him with such strokes of blasphemy, malice, and falsehood, as perhaps he could not otherwise have attained. Therefore, I do not wonder that they are clever and smart, that they raise a laugh, and are received with applause among those who are like-minded with themselves. But unless the Lord is pleased to grant them repentance though it is rather to be feared some of them are given up to judicial hardness of heart, how much better would it have been for them, had they been born idiots or lunatics, than to be distinguished as the willing, industrious, and successful instruments of the powers of darkness, in beguiling, perverting, and ruining the souls of men! Alas, what are parts and talents, or any distinctions which give pre-eminence in life, unless they are sanctified by the grace of God, and directed to the accomplishment of his will and glory! From the expression, “Bind them in bundles, and burn them,” I have been led to think, that the deceivers and the deceived, they who have prostituted their gifts or influence to encourage others in sin, and they who have perished by their means, may in another world have some peculiar and inseparable connection, and spend an eternity in fruitless lamentation that ever they were connected here.

Your Lordship, I doubt not feels the force of that line,

O, to grace how great a debtor!—

Had not the Lord separated you for himself, your rank, your abilities, your influence, which now you chiefly value as enlarging your opportunities

of usefulness, might, nay certainly would, have been diverted into the opposite channel.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

November 5, 1774.

MY LORD,

I HAVE not very lately had recourse to the expedient of descanting upon a text, but I believe it the best method I can take to avoid ringing changes upon a few obvious topics, which I suppose uniformly present themselves to my mind when I am about to write to your Lordship. Just now, that sweet expression of David occurred to my thoughts, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Permit me, without plan or premeditation, to make a few observations upon it; and may your Lordship feel the peace, the confidence, the blessedness, which a believing application of the words is suited to inspire.

The Socinians, and others, in their unhappy laboured attempts to darken the principal glory and foundation-comfort of the gospel, employ their critical sophistry against those texts which expressly and doctrinally declare the Redeemer’s character, and affect to triumph, if in any manuscript or ancient version they can find a variation from the received copies which seems to favour their cause. But we may venture to wave the authority of every disputed or disputable text, and maintain the truth against their cavils from the current language and tenor of the whole scripture. David’s words, in Psal. xxiii, are alone a decisive proof that Jesus is Jehovah, if they will but allow two things, which I think they cannot deny:—1. That our Saviour assumes to himself the character of the Shepherd of his people;—and, 2. That he did not come into the world to abridge those advantages which the servants of God enjoyed before his incarnation. Upon these premises, which cannot be gainsaid without setting aside the whole New Testament, the conclusion is undeniable: for if Jehovah was David’s Shepherd, unless Jesus be Jehovah, we who live under the gospel have an unspeakable disadvantage, in being entrusted to the care of one who, according to the Socinians, is a mere man; and, upon the Arian scheme, is at the most a creature, and infinitely short of possessing those perfections which David contemplated in his Shepherd. He had a Shepherd whose wisdom and power were infinite, and might therefore warrantably conclude he should not want, and need not fear. And we also may conclude the same, if our Shepherd be the Lord or Jehovah, but not otherwise. Besides, the very nature of the Shepherd’s office respecting the state of such frail creatures as we are, requires those attributes for the due discharge of it which are incommunicably divine. He must intimately know every individual of the flock: his eye must be upon them every one, and his ear open to their prayers, and his arm stretched out for their relief, in all

places and in all ages: every thought of every heart must be open to his view, and his wisdom must penetrate, and his arm control and over-rule, all the hidden and complicated machinations of the powers of darkness: he must have the administration of universal providence over all the nations, families, and persons upon earth, or he could not effectually manage for those who put their trust in him, in that immense variety of cases and circumstances in which they are found. Reason, as well as scripture, may convince us, that he who gathereth the outcasts of Israel, who healeth the broken in heart, who upholdeth all that fall, raiseth up all that are bowed down, and upon whom the eyes of all wait for their support, can be no other than he who telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names, who is great in power, and whose understanding is infinite. To this purpose likewise the prophet Isaiah describes this mighty Shepherd, chap. xl. 9-17, both as to his person and office.

But is not this indeed the great mystery of godliness! How just is the apostle's observation, that no man can say Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost! How astonishing the thought,—that the Maker of heaven and earth, the Holy One of Israel, before whose presence the earth shook, the heavens dropped, when he displayed a faint emblem of his majesty upon Sinai, should afterwards appear in the form of a servant, and hang upon a cross, the sport and scorn of wicked men! I cannot wonder that to the wise men of the world this appears absurd, unreasonable, and impossible; yet to right reason, to reason enlightened, and sanctified, however amazing the proposition be, yet it appears true and necessary, upon a supposition that a holy God is pleased to pardon sinners in a way suited to display the awful glories of his justice. The same arguments which prove the blood of bulls and goats insufficient to take away sin, will conclude against the utmost doings or sufferings of men or angels. The Redeemer of sinners must be mighty; he must have a personal dignity, to stamp such a value upon his undertakings as that thereby God may appear just, as well as merciful, in justifying the ungodly for his sake; and he must be all-sufficient to bless, and almighty to protect those who come unto him for safety and life.

Such a one is our Shepherd. This is he of whom we, through grace, are enabled to say, we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. We are his by every tie and right; he made us, he redeemed us, he reclaimed us from the hand of our enemies, and we are his by our own voluntary surrender of ourselves; for, though we once slighted, despised, and opposed him, he made us willing in the day of his power: he knocked at the door of our hearts; but we, at least I, barred and fastened it against him as much and as

long as possible. But when he revealed his love we could stand out no longer. Like sheep, we are weak, destitute, defenceless, prone to wander, unable to return, and always surrounded with wolves. But all is made up in the fullness, ability, wisdom, compassion, care, and faithfulness of our great Shepherd. He guides, protects, feeds, heals, and restores, and will be our guide and our God even until death. Then he will meet us, receive us, and present us unto himself, and we shall be near him, and like him, and with him for ever.

Ah! my Lord, what a subject is this! I trust it is the joy of your heart. Placed as you are by his hand in a superior rank, you see and feel that the highest honours, and the most important concerns that terminate with the present life, are trivial as the sports of children in comparison with the views and the privileges you derive from the glorious gospel; and your situation in life renders the grace bestowed upon you the more conspicuous and distinguishing. I have somewhere met with a similar reflection of Henry IV. of France, to this purpose, that, though many came into the world the same day with him, he was probably the only one among them that was born to be a king. Your Lordship is acquainted with many, who, if not born on the same day with you, were born to titles, estates, and honours; but how few of them were born to the honour of making a public and consistent profession of the glorious gospel! The hour is coming, when all honours and possessions, but this which cometh of God only, will be eclipsed and vanish, and, like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind. How miserable will they then be who must leave their all! What a mortifying thought does Horace put in the way of those who disdain to read the scriptures!

Linquenda tellus, et domus, et placens
Uxor: neque harum, quas colis, arborum
Te, præter invisas cupressos,
Ulla brevem dominum sequetur.

But grace and faith can make the lowest state of life supportable, and make a dismissal from the highest desirable. Of the former I have many living proofs and witnesses around me. Your Lordship, I trust, will have sweet experience of the latter, when, after having fulfilled the will of God in your generation, you shall be called (I hope in some yet distant day) to enter into your Master's joy. In the meantime, how valuable are life, talents, influence, and opportunities of every kind, if we are enabled to improve and lay out all for him who hath thus loved us, thus provided for us? As to myself, I would hope there are few who have so clear a sense of their obliga-

tions to him, who make such unsuitable and languid returns as I do. I think I have a desire to serve him better; but, alas! evil is present with me. Surely I shall feel something like shame and regret for my coldness, even in heaven, for I find I am never happier than when I am most ashamed of myself upon this account here.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVII.

December 8, 1774.

MY LORD,

HOW wonderful is the patience of God towards sinful men! In him they live, and move, and have their being, and, if he were to withdraw his support for a single moment, they must perish. He maintains their lives, guards their persons, supplies their wants, while they employ the powers and faculties they receive from him in a settled course of opposition to his will. They trample upon his laws, affront his government, and despise his grace; yet still he spares. To silence all his adversaries in a moment would require no extraordinary exertion of his power; but his forbearance towards them manifests his glory, and gives us cause to say, Who is a God like unto thee?

Sometimes, however, there are striking instances of his displeasure against sin. When such events take place, immediately upon a public and premeditated contempt offered to Him that sitteth in the heavens, I own they remind me of the danger of standing, if I may so speak, in the Lord's way; for though his long-suffering is astonishing, and many dare him to his face daily, with seeming impunity, yet he sometimes strikes an awful and unexpected blow, and gives an illustration of that solemn word, "Whoever hardened himself against the Lord and prospered?" But how am I to make this observation? I ought to do it with the deepest humiliation, remembering that I once stood, according to my years and ability, in the foremost rank of his avowed opposers, and, with a determined and unwearied enmity renounced, defied, and blasphemed him. "But he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy;" and therefore I was spared, and reserved to speak of his goodness.

Josephus, when speaking of the death of Herod Agrippa, ascribes it to a natural cause, and, says he was seized with excruciating pains in his bowels. But Luke informs us of the true cause: an angel of the Lord smote him. Had we a modern history, written by an inspired pen, we should probably often be reminded of such an interposition where we are not ordinarily aware of it. For though the springs of actions and events are concealed from us for the most part, and vain men carry on their schemes with confidence, as though the Lord had forsaken the earth, yet they are under his eye and control; and faith, in some measure, instructed by the specimens of his government recorded in the scriptures, can trace and admire his hand, and can see how he takes the wise in their own craftiness, stains the pride of human glo-

ry; and that when sinners speak proudly, he is above them, and makes everything bend or break before him.

While we lament the growth and pernicious effects of infidelity, and see how wicked men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived; what gratitude should fill our hearts to him, who has been pleased to call us out of the horrid darkness in which multitudes are bewildered and lost, into the glorious light of his gospel! Faint are our warmest conceptions of this mercy. In order to understand it fully, we should have a full and adequate sense of the evil from which we are delivered; the glory to which we are called; and especially, of the astonishing means to which we owe our life and hope, the humiliation, sufferings, and death of the Son of God. But our views of these points, while in our present state, are and must be exceedingly weak and disproportionate. We know them but in part, we see them *ἔσοπτον*, by *reflection*, rather the images than the things themselves; and though they are faithfully represented in the mirror of God's word, to us they appear indistinct, because we see them through a gross medium of ignorance and unbelief. Hereafter every vail shall be removed; we shall know, in another manner than we do now, the unspeakable evil of sin, and the insupportable dreadfulness of God's displeasure against it, when we see the world in flames, and hear the final sentence denounced upon the ungodly. We shall have far other thoughts of Jesus when we see him as he is: and shall then be able to make a more affecting estimate of the love which moved him to be made a substitute and a curse for us: and we shall then know what great things God has prepared for them that love him. Then with transport, we shall adopt the queen of Sheba's language, It was a true report we heard in yonder dark world; but, behold, the half, the thousandth part, was not told us! In the meantime, may such conceptions as we are enabled to form of these great truths, fill our hearts, and be mingled with all our thoughts, and all our concerns; may the Lord, by faith, give us an abiding evidence of the reality and importance of the things which cannot yet be seen; so shall we be enabled to live above the world while we are in it, uninfluenced either by its blandishments or its frowns; and, with a noble simplicity and singularity, avow and maintain the cause of God in truth, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. He whom we serve is able to support and protect us; and he well deserves at our hands, that we should be willing to endure, for his sake, much more than he will ever permit us to be exercised with. The believer's call, duty, and privilege, is beautifully and forcibly set forth in Milton's character of Abdiel, at the end of the fifth book:

———Faithful found
Among the faithless, faithful only he,
Among innumerable false; unmov'd,
Unshaken, uneduc'd, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal:
Nor number, nor example, with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind
Though single———

Methinks your Lordship's situation particularly resembles that in which the poet has placed Abdiel. You are not, indeed, called to serve God quite alone; but amongst those of your own rank, and with whom, the station in which he has placed you, necessitates you to converse, how few are there who can understand, second, or approve, the principles upon which you act, or easily bear a conduct which must impress conviction, or reflect dishonour upon themselves! But you are not alone; the Lord's people (many of whom you will not know till you meet them in glory) are helping you here with their prayers; his angels are commissioned to guard and guide your steps; yea, the Lord himself fixes his eye of mercy upon your private and your public path, and is near you at your right hand, that you may not be moved. That he may comfort you with the light of his countenance, and uphold you with the arm of his power, is my frequent prayer.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

January 20, 1775.

MY LORD,

WE have entered upon another year. So have thousands, perhaps millions, who will not see it close. An alarming thought to the worldling! at least it should be so. I have an imperfect remembrance of an account I read when I was a boy, of an ice-palace, built one winter at Petersburg. The walls, the roof, the floors, the furniture, were all of ice, but finished with taste; and everything that might be expected in a royal palace was to be found there; the ice, while in the state of water, being previously coloured, so that to the eye all seemed formed of proper materials: but all was cold, useless, and transient. Had the frost continued till now, the palace might have been standing; but with the returning spring it melted away, like the baseless fabric of a vision. Methinks there should have been one stone in the building, to have retained the inscription, *Sic transit gloria mundi!* for no contrivance could exhibit a fitter illustration of the vanity of human life. Men build and plan as if their works were to endure for ever; but the wind passes over them, and they are gone. In the midst of all their preparations, or at farthest, when they think they have just completed their designs, their breath goeth forth, they return to their earth; in that very day their thoughts perish.

How many sleep who kept the world awake!

Yet this ice-house had something of a leisurely dissolution, though, when it began to decay, all the art of man was unable to prop it: but often death comes hastily, and, like the springing of a mine, destroys to the very foundations, without previous notice. Then all we have been concerned in here (all but the consequences of our conduct, which will abide to eternity) will be no more to us than the remembrance of a dream. This truth is too plain to be denied; but the greater part of mankind act as if they were convinced it was false: they spend their days in vanity, and in a moment they go down to the grave. What cause of thankfulness have they who are delivered from this delusion, and who, by the knowledge of the glorious gospel, have learned their true state and end, are saved from the love of the present world, from the heart-distressing fear of death; and know, that if their earthly house were dissolved, like the ice-palace, they have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!

Yet even these are much concerned to realize the brevity and uncertainty of their present state, that they may be stimulated to make the

most and the best of it, to redeem their time, and manage their precarious opportunities, so as may most tend to the praise and glory of him who has called them out of darkness into marvellous light. Why should any that have tasted that the Lord is gracious wish to live another day, but that they may have the honour to be fellow-workers with him, instrumental in promoting his designs, and of laying themselves out to the utmost of their abilities and influence in his service? To enjoy a sense of his lovingkindness, and to have the light of his countenance lifted up upon our souls, is indeed, respecting ourselves, the best part of life, yea, better than life itself; but this we shall have to unspeakably greater advantage, when we have finished our course, and shall be wholly freed from the body of sin. And therefore, the great desirable while here, seems to be grace, that we may serve him and suffer for him in the world. Though our first wish immediately upon our own accounts might be, to depart and be with Jesus, which is "far better", yet a lively thought of our immense obligations to his redeeming love, may reconcile us to a much longer continuance here, if we may by any means be subservient to diffuse the glory of his name, and the blessings of his salvation, which is God's great and principal end in preserving the world itself. When historians and politicians descant upon the rise and fall of empires, with all their professed sagacity, in tracing the connection between causes and effects, they are totally unacquainted with the great master-wheel which manages the whole movement, that is, the Lord's design in favour of his church and kingdom. To this every event is subordinate; to this every interfering interest must stoop. How easily might this position be proved, by reviewing the history of the period about the Reformation. Whether Dr. Robertson considers things in this light, in his history of Charles V. I know not, as I have not seen his books; but if not, however elaborate his performance may be in other respects, I must venture to say, it is essentially defective, and cannot give that light and pleasure to a spiritual reader of which the subject is capable. And I doubt not, that some who are yet unborn will hereafter clearly see and remark, that the present unhappy disputes between Great Britain and America, with their consequences, whatever they may be, are part of a series of events, of which the extension and interests of the church of Christ were the principal final causes. In a word, that Jesus may be known, trusted, and adored, and sinners, by the power of his gospel, be rescued from sin and Satan, is comparatively, the one great business, for the sake of which the succession of day and night, summer and winter, is still maintained; and when the plan of redemption is consummated, sin, which now almost fills the earth, will then set it on fire; and the united interest of all the rest of mankind, when detached from that of the people of God, will not plead

for its preservation a single day. In this view, I congratulate your Lordship, that however your best endeavours to serve the temporal interests of the nation may fall short of your wishes; yet, so far as your situation gives you opportunity of supporting the gospel-cause, and facilitating Its progress, you have a prospect both of a more certain and more important success. For instance, it was, under God, your Lordship's favour and influence that brought me into the ministry. And though I be nothing, yet he who put it into your heart to patronize me, has been pleased not to suffer what you then did for his sake to be wholly in vain. He has been pleased, in a course of years, by so unworthy an instrument as I am, to awaken a number of persons, who were at that time dead in trespasses and sins; but now some of them are pressing on to the prize of their high calling in Christ Jesus; and some of them are already before the throne. Should I suggest in some companies, that the conversion of a hundred sinners (more or less) to God, is an event of more real importance than the temporal prosperity of the greatest nation upon earth, I should be charged with ignorance and arrogance; but your Lordship is skilled in scriptural arithmetic, which alone can teach us to estimate the value of souls, and will agree with me, that one soul is worth more than the whole world, on account of its redemption-price, its vast capacities, and its duration. Should we suppose a nation to consist of forty millions, the whole and each individual to enjoy as much good as this life can afford, without abatement, for a term of fifty years each; all this good, or an equal quantity, might be exhausted by a single person in two thousand millions of years, which would be but a moment in comparison of the eternity which would still follow: and if this good were merely temporal good, the whole aggregate of it would be evil and misery, if compared with that happiness in God, of which only they who are made partakers of a divine life are capable. On the other hand, were a whole nation to be destroyed by such accumulated miseries as attended the siege of Jerusalem, the sum-total of these calamities would be but trifling, if set in competition with what every single person that dies in sin has to expect, when the sentence of everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power, shall be executed.

What an unexpected round have my thoughts taken since I set out from the ice-palace? It is time to relieve your Lordship, and to subscribe myself, &c.

LETTER XIX.

February 23, 1775.

MY LORD,

I ASSENT to our Lord's declaration, "Without me ye can do nothing," not only upon the authority of the speaker, but from the same irresistible and experimental evidence, as if he had told me, that I cannot make the sun to shine, or change the course of the seasons. Though my pen and my tongue sometimes move freely, yet the total incapacity and stagnation of thought I labour under at other times, convinces me, that, in myself, I have not sufficiency to think a good thought; and, I believe the case would be the same, if that little measure of knowledge and abilities, which I am too prone to look upon as my own, were a thousand times greater than it is. For every new service I stand in need of a new supply, and can bring forth nothing of my supposed store into actual exercise, but by his immediate assistance. His gracious influence is that to those who are best furnished with gifts, which the water is to the mill, or the wind to the ship, without which the whole apparatus is motionless and useless. I apprehend that we lose much of the comfort which might arise from a sense of our continual dependence upon him, and of course fall short of acknowledging, as we ought, what we receive from him, by mistaking the manner of his operation. Perhaps we take it too much for granted, that communications from himself must bear some kind of sensible impression that they are his, and therefore are ready to give our own industry or ingenuity credit for those performances in which we can perceive no such impression; yet it is very possible that we may be under his influence when we are least aware of it; and though what we say, or write, or do, may seem no way extraordinary, yet that we should be led to such a particular turn of thought at one time rather than at another, has, in my own concerns, often appeared to me remarkable, from the circumstances which have attended, or the consequences which have followed. How often, in the choice of a text, or in the course of a sermon, or in a letter to a friend, have I been led to speak a word in season! and what I have expressed at large, and in general, has been so exactly suited to some case which I was utterly unacquainted with, that I could hardly have hit it so well, had I been previously informed of it. Some instances of this kind have been so striking, as hardly to admit a doubt of superior agency. And indeed, if believers in Jesus, however unworthy in themselves, are the temples of the Holy Ghost; if the Lord lives, dwells, and walks in them; if he is their life and their light; if he has promised to guide them with his eye, and to work in them both to

will and to do of his own good pleasure,—methinks what I have mentioned, and more, may be reasonably expected. That line in the hymn,

Help I every moment need,

is not a hyperbolic expression, but strictly and literally true, not only in great emergencies, but in our smoother hours, and most familiar paths. This gracious assistance is afforded in a way imperceptible to ourselves, to hide pride from us, and to prevent us from being indolent and careless with respect to the use of appointed means; and it would be likewise more abundantly, and perhaps more sensibly afforded, were our spirits more simple in waiting upon the Lord. But, alas! a divided heart, an undue attachment to some temporal object, sadly deaden our spirits (I speak for myself), and grieves the Lord's Spirit; so that we walk in darkness and at a distance, and though called to great privileges, live far below them. But methinks the thought of him who is always near, and upon whom we do and must incessantly depend, should suggest a powerful motive for the closest attention to his revealed will, and the most punctual compliance with it; for so far as the Lord withdraws we become as blind men, and with the clearest light, and upon the plainest ground, we are liable, or rather sure, to stumble at every step.

Though there is a principle of consciousness, and a determination of the will, sufficient to denominate our thoughts and performances our own, yet I believe mankind in general are more under an invisible agency than they apprehend. The Lord, immediately from himself, and perhaps by the ministry of the holy angels, guides, prompts, restrains, or warns his people. So there undoubtedly is what I may call a black inspiration, the influence of the evil spirits who work in the hearts of the disobedient, and not only excite their wills, but assist their faculties, and qualify as well as incline them to be more assiduously wicked, and more extensively mischievous, than they could be of themselves. I consider Voltaire, for instance, and many writers of the same stamp, to be little more than secretaries and amanuenses of one who has unspeakably more wit and adroitness in promoting infidelity and immorality, than they of themselves can justly pretend to. They have, for a while, the credit (if I may so call it) of the fund from whence they draw; but the world little imagines who is the real and original author of that philosophy and poetry, of those fine turns and sprightly inventions, which are so generally admired. Perhaps many, now applauded for their genius, would have been comparatively dolts, had they not been engaged in a cause which Satan has so much interest in supporting.

But to return to the more pleasing subject. How great and honourable is the privilege of a true believer! That he has neither wisdom nor strength in himself is no disadvantage; for he is connected with infinite wisdom and almighty power. Though weak as a worm, his arms are strengthened by the mighty God of Jacob, and all things become possible, yea easy, to him, that occur within the compass of his proper duty and calling. The Lord, whom he serves, engages to proportion his strength to his day, whether it be a day of service or of suffering; and though he be fallible and short-sighted, exceeding liable to mistake and imposition, yet, while he retains a sense that he is so, and, with the simplicity of a child, asks counsel and direction of the Lord, he seldom takes a wrong step, at least not in matters of consequence, and even his inadvertencies are overruled for good. If he forgets his true state, and thinks himself to be something, he presently finds he is indeed nothing; but if he is content to be nothing, and to have nothing, he is sure to find a seasonable and abundant communication of all that he wants. Thus he lives, like Israel in the wilderness, upon mere bounty; but then it is a bounty unchangeable, unwearied, inexhaustible, and all-sufficient. Moses, when speaking of the methods the Lord took to humble Israel, mentions his feeding them with manna as one method. I could not understand this for a time. I thought they were rather in danger of being proud, when they saw themselves provided for in such an extraordinary way. But the manna would not keep; they could not hoard it up, and were therefore in a state of absolute dependence from day to day. This appointment was well suited to humble them. Thus it is with us in spirituals. We should be better pleased, perhaps, to be set up with a stock or sufficiency at once,—such an inherent portion of wisdom and power, as we might depend upon, at least for common occasions, without being constrained by a sense of indigence, to have continual recourse to the Lord for everything we want. But his way is best. His own glory is most displayed, and our safety most secured, by keeping us quite poor and empty in ourselves, and supplying us from one minute to another, according to our need. This, if anything, will prevent boasting, and keep a sense of gratitude awake in our hearts. This is well adapted to quicken us in prayer, and furnishes us with a thousand occasions for praise, which would otherwise escape our notice.

But who or what are we, that the Most High should thus notice us! should visit us every morning, and water us every moment! It is an astonishing thought, that God should thus dwell with men! that he, before whom the mightiest earthly potentates are less than nothing, and vanity, should thus stoop and accommodate himself to the situation,

wants, and capacities of the weakest, meanest, and poorest of his children! But so it hath pleased him. He seeth not as man seeth.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

August—1775.

MY LORD,

I HAVE no apt preface or introduction at hand; and as I have made it almost a rule not to study for what I should offer your Lordship, I therefore beg leave to begin abruptly.

It is the future promised privilege of believers in Jesus, that they shall be as the angels; and there is a sense in which we should endeavour to be as the angels now. This is intimated to us where we are taught to pray, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” I have sometimes amused myself with supposing an angel should be appointed to reside a while upon earth in a human body; not in sinful flesh, like ours, but in a body free from infirmity, and still preserving an unabated sense of his own happiness in the favour of God, and of his unspeakable obligation to his goodness; and then I have tried to judge, as well as I could, how such an angel would comport himself in such a situation. I know not that I ever enlarged upon the thought, either in preaching or writing. Permit me to follow it a little in this paper.

Were I acquainted with this heavenly visitant, I am willing to hope I should greatly reverence him; and, if permitted, be glad, in some cases, to consult him: in some, but not in all; for I think my fear would be equal to my love. Methinks I could never venture to open my heart freely to him, and unfold to him my numberless complaints and infirmities; for, as he could have no experience of the like things himself, I should suppose he would not know how fully to pity me, indeed hardly how to bear with me, if I told him all. Alas! what a preposterous, strange, vile creature should I appear to any angel, if he knew me as I am! It is well for me that Jesus was made lower than the angels, and that the human nature he assumed was not distinct from the common nature of mankind, though secured from the common depravity; and because he submitted to be under the law in our name and stead, though he was free from sin himself, yet sin and its consequences being, for our sakes, charged upon him, he acquired, in the days of his humiliation, an experimental sympathy with his poor people. He knows the effects of sin and temptation upon us, by that knowledge whereby he knows all things; but he knows them likewise in a way more suitable for our comfort and relief, by the sufferings and exercises he passed through for us. Hence arises encouragement. We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted even as we are. When I add to this, the consideration of his power, promises, and grace,

and that he is exalted on purpose to pity, relieve, and save, I gather courage. With him I dare be free, and am not sorry, but glad, that he knows me perfectly, that not a thought of my heart is hidden from him. For without this infinite and exact knowledge of my disease, how could he effectually administer to my cure?—But whither am I rambling? I seem to have lost sight of the angel already. I am now coming back, that if he cannot effectually pity me, he may at least animate and teach me.

In the first place, I take it for granted this angel would think himself a stranger and pilgrim upon earth. He would not forget that his μ ¹ was in heaven. Surely he would look upon all the bustle of human life (farther than the design of his mission might connect him with it) with more indifference than we look upon the sports of children, or the amusements of idiots and lunatics, which give us an uneasiness, rather than excite a desire of joining in them. He would judge of everything around him, by the reference and tendency it had to promote the will of him that sent him; and the most specious or splendid appearances, considered in any other view, would make no impression upon him.

Consequently, as to his own concernment, all his aim and desire would be, to fulfil the will of God. All situations would be alike to him; whether he was commanded, as in the case of Sennacherib, to destroy a mighty army with a stroke; or, as in the case of Hagar, to attend upon a woman, a servant, a slave; both services would be to him equally honourable and important, because he was in both equally pleasing his Lord, which would be his element and his joy, whether he was appointed to guide the reins of empire, or to sweep the streets.

Again, the angel would doubtless exhibit a striking example of benevolence; for, being free from selfish bias, filled with a sense of the love of God, and a knowledge of his adorable perfections, his whole heart, and soul, and strength, would be engaged and exerted, both from duty and inclination, to relieve the miseries, and advance the happiness of all around him: and in this he would follow the pattern of him who doth good to all, commanding his sun to rise, and his rain to fall, upon the just and the unjust; though, from the same pattern, he would show an especial regard to the household of faith. An angel would take but little part in the controversies, contentions, and broils, which might happen in the time of his sojourning here, but would be a friend to all, so far as consistent with the general good.

The will and glory of God being the angel's great view, and having a more lively sense of the realities of an unseen world than we can at pre-

¹ Citizenship, or conversation.

sent conceive, he would certainly, in the first and chief place, have the success and spread of the glorious gospel at heart. Angels, though not redeemed with blood, yet feel themselves nearly concerned in the work of redemption. They admire its mysteries. We may suppose them well informed in the works of creation and providence. But, unlike many men, who are satisfied with the knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, or history, they search and pry into the counsels of redeeming love, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, and think themselves well employed to be ministering spirits, to minister to the heirs of salvation. It would therefore be his chief delight to espouse and promote their cause, and to employ all his talents and influence in spreading the favour and knowledge of the name of Jesus, which is the only and effectual means of bringing sinners out of bondage and darkness into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Lastly, though his zeal for the glory of his Lord would make him willing to continue here till he had finished the work given him to do, he would, I am persuaded, look forward with desire to the appointed moment of his recall, that he might be freed from beholding and mixing with the sin and vanity of those who know not God, render his account with joy, and be welcomed to heaven with a "Well done, good and faithful servant." Surely he would long for this, as a labourer for the setting sun; and would not form any connection with the things of time, which should prompt him to wish his removal protracted for a single hour beyond the period of his prescribed service.

Alas, why am I not more like an angel? My views, in my better judgment, are the same. My motives and obligations are even stronger: an angel is not so deeply indebted to the grace of God, as a believing sinner, who was once upon the brink of destruction, who has been redeemed with blood, and might justly have been, before now, shut up with the powers of darkness, without hope. Yet the merest trifles are sufficient to debase my views, damp my activity, and impede my endeavours in the Lord's service, though I profess to have no other end or desire which can make a continuance in life worthy my wish.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXI.

November — 1775.

MY LORD,

DUM loquimur tempus fugit. [As we speak, time flies.] In the midst of the hurries and changes of this unsettled state, we glide along swiftly towards an unchangeable world, and shall soon have as little connection with the scenes we are now passing through as we have with what happened before the flood. All that appears great and interesting in the present life, abstracted from its influence upon our internal character, and our everlasting allotment, will soon be as unreal as the visions of the night. This we know and confess; but though our judgments are convinced, it is seldom our hearts are duly affected by the thought. And while I find it easy to write in this moralizing strain, I feel myself disposed to be seriously engaged about trifles, and trifling in the most serious concerns, as if I believed the very contrary. It is with good reason the Lord challenges as his own prerogative the full knowledge of the deceitfulness, desperate wickedness, and latent depths of the human heart, which is capable of making even his own people so shamefully inconsistent with themselves and with their acknowledged principles.

I find that, when I have something agreeable in expectation (suppose, for instance, it were a few hours conversation with your Lordship), my imagination paints and prepares the scene beforehand; hurries me over the intervening space of time, as though it were a useless blank, and anticipates the pleasure I propose. Many of my thoughts of this kind are mere waking dreams; for perhaps the opportunity I am eagerly waiting for never happens, but is swallowed up by some unforeseen disappointment; or, if not, something from within or without prevents its answering the idea I had formed of it. Nor does my fancy confine itself within the narrow limits of probabilities; it can busy itself as eagerly in ranging after chimeras and impossibilities, and engage my attention to the ideal pursuit of things that are never likely to happen. In these respects my imagination travels with wings; so that if the wildness, the multiplicity, the variety of the phantoms which pass through my mind in the space of a winter's day were known to my fellow creatures, they would probably deem me, as I am often ready to deem myself, but a more sober and harmless kind of lunatic. But if I endeavour to put this active roving power in a right track, and to represent to myself those scenes which, though not yet present, I know will soon be realised, and have a greatness which the most enlarged exercise of my powers cannot comprehend: if I would fix my thoughts upon the hour of death, the end of the world, the coming of the Judge, or similar subjects; then my imagination

is presently tame, cold, and jaded, travels very slowly, and is soon wearied in the road of truth; though in the fairy fields of uncertainty and folly it can skip from mountain to mountain. Mr. Addison supposes, that the imagination alone, as it can be differently affected, is capable of making us either inconceivably happy or miserable. I am sure it is capable of making us miserable, though I believe it seldom gives us much pleasure, but such as is to be found in a fool's paradise. But I am sure, were my outward life and conduct perfectly free from blame, the disorders and defilement of my imagination are sufficient to constitute me a chief sinner in the sight of him to whom the thoughts and intents of the heart are continually open, and who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Upon this head I cannot but lament how universally almost education is suited, and as it were designed, to add to the stimulus of depraved nature. A cultivated imagination is commended and sought after as a very desirable talent, though it seldom means more than the possession of a large stock of other people's dreams and fables, with a certain quickness in compounding them, enlarging upon them, and exceeding them by inventions of our own. Poets, painters, and even historians are employed to assist us from our early years in forming an habitual relish for shadows and colourings, which both indispose for the search of truth and even unfit us for its reception, unless proposed just in our own way. The best effect of the belles lettres upon the imagination seems generally expressed by the word taste. And what is this taste, but a certain disposition which loves to be humoured, soothed, and flattered, and which can hardly receive or bear the most important truths, if they be not decorated and set off with such a delicacy and address as taste requires? I say the most important truths; because truths of a secular importance strike so closely upon the senses, that the decision of taste perhaps is not waited for. Thus, if a man be informed of the birth of his child, or that his house is on fire, the message takes up his thoughts, and he is seldom much disgusted with the manner in which it is delivered. But what an insuperable bar is the refined taste of many to their profiting by the preaching of the gospel, or even to their hearing it. Though the subject of a discourse be weighty, and some just representation given of the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of Christ; yet, if there be something amiss in the elocution, language, or manner of the preacher, people of taste must be possessed, in a good measure, of grace likewise, if they can hear him with tolerable patience. And perhaps three-fourths of those who are accounted the most sensible and judicious in the auditory, will remember little about the sermon, but the tone of the voice, the awkwardness of the attitude, the obsolete expressions, and the like; while the poor and sim-

ple, not being encumbered with this hurtful accomplishment, receive the messenger as the Lord's servant, and the truth as the Lord's word, and are comforted and edified.—But I stop. Some people would say, that I must suppose your Lordship to have but little taste, or else much grace, or I should not venture to trouble you with such letters as mine.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXII.

[no date given]

MY LORD,

THE apostle speaks of a blessedness which it is the design of the gospel to impart to those who receive it. The Galatians once had it, and spoke of it. The apostle reminds them of their loss, which is left upon record as a warning to us. His expression has led me sometimes to consider wherein a christian's present blessedness consists; I mean, that which is attainable in this state of trial, and the sense and exercise of which may be, and too often is, suspended and taken from us. It is a blessedness which, if we speak of man in a natural state, his eye hath not seen, nor his ear heard so as to understand it, nor can the idea of it arise in his heart. It is no way dependent upon outward circumstances. Prosperity cannot impart it, preserve or supply the want of it; nor can adversity put it out of our reach. The wise cannot acquire it by dint of superior abilities; nor shall the simple miss it for want of capacity.

The state of true believers, compared with that of others, is always blessed. If they are born from above, and united to Jesus, they are delivered from condemnation, and are heirs of eternal life, and may therefore well be accounted happy. But I consider now, not their harvest, but their first fruits; not their portion in reversion, but the earnest attainable in this life; not what they shall be in heaven, but what, in an humble attendance upon the Lord, they may be while upon earth. There is even at present a prize of our high calling set before us. It is much to be desired, that we had such a sense of its value as might prompt us so to run that we might obtain. I have thought this blessedness may be comprised in five particulars, though, in order to take a succinct view of the subject, some of these might be branched out into several others; but I would not by too many subdivisions give my letter the air of a sermon.

In the first place, a clear, well grounded, habitual persuasion of our acceptance in the Beloved is attainable; and though we may be safe, we cannot be said to enjoy blessedness without it. To be in a state of suspense and uncertainty in a point of so great importance is painful; and the Lord has accordingly provided that his people may have strong consolation on this head. They are blessed therefore who have such views of the power, grace, and suitableness of Jesus, and the certainty and security of redemption in him, together with such a consciousness that they have anchored their hopes and ventured their all upon his person, work, and promise, as furnishes them with a ready answer to all the cavils of unbelief and Satan, in the apostle's manner, Rom. viii. 31-37. That Paul

could thus challenge and triumph over all charges and enemies, was not an appendage of his office as an apostle, but a part of his experience as a believer; and it lies equally open to us, for we have the same gospel and the same promises as he had: nor is the efficacy of the Holy Spirit's teaching a whit weakened by length of time. But many stop short of this. They have a hope, but it rather springs from their frames and feelings than from a spiritual apprehension of the Redeemer's engagements and fulness, and therefore fluctuates and changes like the weather. Could they be persuaded to pray with earnestness and importunity, as the apostle prays for them, Ephes. i. 17, 18. and iii. 16, 19. they would find a blessedness which they have not yet known; for it is said, "Ask, and ye shall receive." And it is said likewise, "Ye receive not, because ye ask not."

Could this privilege be enjoyed singly, the natural man would have no objection to it. He would (as he thinks) be pleased to know he should be saved at last, provided that while here he might live in his sins. But the believer will not, cannot think himself blessed, unless he has likewise a conscience void of offence. This was the apostle's daily exercise, though no one was further from a legal spirit, or more dependent upon Jesus for acceptance. But if we live in any known sin, or allow ourselves in the customary omission of any known duty, supposing it possible in such a case to preserve a sense of our acceptance (which can hardly be supposed; for if the Spirit be grieved, our evidences decline of course) yet we could not be easy. If a traveller was absolutely sure of reaching his journey's end in safety, yet if he walked with a thorn in his foot, he must take every step in pain. Such a thorn will be felt in the conscience till we are favoured with a simplicity of heart, and made willing in all things, great or small, to yield obedience to the authority of the Lord's precepts, and make them the standing rule of our conduct, without wilfully admitting a single exception. At the best, we shall be conscious of innumerable shortcomings, and shameful defilements; but these things will not break our peace, if our hearts are upright. But if we trifle with light, and connive at what we know to be wrong, we shall be weak, restless, and uncomfortable. How many who, we would hope, are the children of the King, are lean from day to day, because some right-hand or right-eye evil, which they cannot persuade themselves to part with, keeps them halting between two opinions! and they are as distant from happiness, as they are from the possibility of reconciling the incompatible services of God and the world. But happy indeed is he who condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

Real communion with the Lord, in his appointed means of grace, is likewise an important branch of this blessedness. They were instituted

for this end, and are sufficient, by virtue of his power and Spirit, to answer it. I do not believe this enjoyment will be always equal. But I believe a comfortable sense of it, in some measure, is generally attainable. To read the scriptures, not as an attorney may read a will, merely to know the sense, but as the heir reads it, as a description and proof of his interest; to hear the gospel, as the voice of our Beloved, so as to have little leisure either for admiring the abilities or censuring the defects of the preacher; and, in prayer, to feel a liberty of pouring out our hearts before the Lord, to behold some glances of his goodness passing before us, and to breathe forth before him the tempers of a child, the spirit of adoption;—and thus, by beholding his glory, to be conformed more and more to his image, and to renew our strength, by drawing water out of the wells of salvation: Herein is blessedness. They who have tasted it can say, it is good for me to draw nigh to God. The soul, thus refreshed by the water of life, is preserved from thirsting after the vanities of the world, thus instructed in the sanctuary, comes down from the mount filled with heavenly wisdom, anointed with a holy unction, and therefore qualified to judge, speak, and act in character, in all the relations and occasions of secular life. In this way, besides the pleasure, a spiritual taste is acquired, something analogous to the meaning of the word taste when applied to music or good breeding, by which discords and improprieties are observed and avoided, as it were by instinct, and what is right is felt and followed, not so much by the force of rules, as by a habit insensibly acquired, and in which the substance of all necessary rules are, if I may so say, digested. O that I knew more of this blessedness, and more of its effects!

Another branch of blessedness is a power of reposing ourselves and our concerns upon the Lord's faithfulness and care, and may be considered in two respects. A reliance upon him that he will surely provide for us, guide us, protect us, be our help in trouble, our shield in danger; so that, however poor, weak, and defenceless in ourselves, we may rejoice in his all-sufficiency as our own;—and farther, in consequence of this, a peaceful, humble submission to his will, under all events, which, upon their first impression, are contrary to our own views and desires. Surely, in a world like this, where everything is uncertain, where we are exposed to trials on every hand, and know not but a single hour may bring forth something painful, yea dreadful to our natural sensations, there can be no blessedness but so far as we are thus enabled to entrust and resign all to the direction and faithfulness of the Lord our Shepherd. For want of more of this spirit, multitudes of professing Christians perplex and wound themselves, and dishonour their high calling, by continual anxieties, alarms, and complaints. They think nothing safe under the Lord's

keeping, unless their own eye is likewise upon it, and are seldom satisfied with any of his dispensations; for, though he gratify their desires in nine instances, a refusal in the tenth spoils the relish of all, and they show the truths of the gospel can afford them little comfort, if self is crossed. But, blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is! He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: he shall be kept in perfect peace, though the earth be moved, and the mountains cast into the midst of the sea.

The paper admonishes me it is time to relieve your Lordship. And I have not room to detain you long upon the fifth particular. It belongs to a believer's blessedness to feel his spirit cheerful and active for the Lord's service in the world. For to what other end should he wish to live? If he thought of himself only, it would be better to depart and be with Jesus immediately. But he is a debtor to his grace and love; and, though strictly he can make no returns, yet he longs to show his thankfulness; and, if the Lord give him a heart to redeem his time, to devote his strength and influence, and lay himself out for his service,—that he may be instrumental in promoting his cause, in comforting his people,—or enable him to let his light shine before men, that his God and his Father may be honoured;—he will account it blessedness. This is indeed the great end of life, and he knows it will evidently appear so at the approach of death; and therefore, while others are cumbered about many things, he esteems this the one thing needful.

I remain, my Lord, &c,

LETTER XXIII.

July — 1776.

MY LORD,

THAT I may not weary you by a preamble, I oblige myself to take the turn of my letter from some passage of scripture; and I fix upon that which just now occurred to my thoughts, a clause in that pattern of prayer which he who best knows our state has been pleased to leave for the instruction of his people, in their great concern of waiting at his throne of grace, Matth. vi. 13. “Lead us not into temptation.” This petition is seasonable at all times, and to all persons who have any right knowledge of themselves, or their spiritual calling.

The word temptation, taken at large, includes every kind of trial. To tempt, is to try or prove. In this sense, it is said, the Lord tempted Abraham, that is, he tried him; for God cannot tempt to evil. He proposed such an act of obedience to him, as was a test of his faith, love, dependence, and integrity. Thus, all our afflictions, under his gracious management, are appointed to prove, manifest, exercise, and purify the graces of his children. And not afflictions only; prosperity likewise is a state of temptation: and many who have endured sharp sufferings, and came off honourably, have been afterwards greatly hurt and ensnared by prosperity. To this purpose the histories of David and Hezekiah are in point. But by temptation we more frequently understand the wiles and force which Satan employs in assaulting our peace, or spreading snares for our feet. He is always practising against us, either directly and from himself, by the access he has to our hearts, or mediately, by the influence he has over the men and the things of this world. The words which follow confirm this sense,—“Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil,” from the *evil one*, as it might be properly rendered here, and in 1 John v. 19. The subtlety and power of this adversary are very great: he is an over-match for us; and we have no hope of safety but in the Lord’s protection. Satan’s action upon the heart may be illustrated by the action of the wind upon the sea. The sea sometimes appears smooth, but it is always disposed to swell and rage, and to obey the impulse of every storm. Thus the heart may be sometimes quiet; but the wind of temptation will awaken and rouse it in a moment: for it is essential to our depraved nature to be unstable and yielding as the water; and when it is under the impression of the enemy, its violence can only be controlled by him who says to the raging sea, “Be still; here shall thy proud waves be stayed.” The branches of temptation are almost innumerable; but the principal may be reduced to the

several faculties of the soul (as we commonly speak) to which they are more directly suited.

He has temptations for the understanding. He can blind the mind with prejudices and false reasonings, and ply it with arguments for infidelity, till the most obvious truths become questionable. Even where the gospel has been received, he can insinuate error, which, for the suddenness and malignity of its effects, may be properly compared to poison. A healthy man may be poisoned in a moment; and, if he be, the baneful drug is usually mixed with his food. Many, who for a while seemed to be sound in the faith, have had their judgments strongly and strangely perverted, and prevailed upon to renounce and oppose the truths they once prized and defended. Such instances are striking proofs of human weakness, and loud calls to watchfulness and dependence, and to beware of leaning to our own understandings. For these purposes he employs both preachers and authors, who, by fine words and fair speeches, beguile the hearts of the unwary. And, by his immediate influence upon the mind, he is able, if the Lord permits him, to entangle those who are providentially placed out of the reach of corrupt and designing men.

He tempts the conscience. By working upon the unbelief of our hearts, and darkening the glory of the gospel, he can hold down the soul to the number, weight, and aggravation of its sins, so that it shall not be able to look up to Jesus, nor draw any comfort from his blood, promises, and grace. How many go burdened in this manner, seeking relief from duties, and perhaps spending their strength in things not commanded, though they hear, and perhaps acknowledge the gospel? Nor are the wisest and most established able to withstand his assaults, if the Lord withdraw, and give him leave to employ his power and subtlety unrestrained. The gospel affords sufficient ground for an abiding assurance of hope; nor should we rest satisfied without it. However, the possession and preservation of this privilege depends upon the Lord's presence with the soul, and his shielding us from Satan's attacks; for I am persuaded he is able to sift and shake the strongest believer upon earth.

He has likewise temptations suited to the will. Jesus makes his people willing in the day of his power; yet there is a contrary principle remaining within them, of which Satan knows how to avail himself. There are occasions in which he almost prevails to set self again upon the throne, as Dagon was raised after he had fallen before the ark. How else should any who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, give way to a repining spirit, account his

dispensations hard, or his precepts too strict, so as to shrink from their observance through the fear of men, or a regard to their worldly interest?

Farther, he has snares for the affections. In managing these, he gains a great advantage from our situation in a world that knows not God. The scriptures give Satan the title of god of this world; and believers learn, by painful experience, how great his power is in and over the persons and things of it. So that to be steadfast in wisdom's ways, requires unremitting efforts, like pressing through a crowd, or swimming against a stream. How hard is it to live in the midst of pitch and not to be defiled? The air of the world is infectious. Our business and unavoidable connections are so interwoven with occasions of sin, and there is so much in our hearts suited to them, that unless we are incessantly upheld by almighty strength, we cannot stand a day or an hour. Past victories afford us no greater security than they did Samson, who was shamefully surprised by enemies whom he had formerly conquered. Nor are we only tempted by compliances that are evil in themselves. With respect to these, perhaps, conscience may awake, and we stand upon our guard: but we are still upon Satan's ground, and while he may seem to allow himself defeated, he can dexterously change his method, and come upon us where we do not suspect him: for, *perim us in licitis*; perhaps our greatest danger arises from things in themselves lawful. He can tempt us by our nearest and dearest friend, and pervert every blessing of a kind providence into an occasion of drawing our hearts from the Giver; yea spiritual blessings gifts, comforts, and even graces, are sometimes the engines by which he practises against us, to fill us with vain confidence and self-sufficiency, or to lull us into formality and indolence.

That wonderful power which we call the imagination, is, I suppose rather the medium of the soul's perceptions during its present state of union with the body, than a spiritual faculty, strictly speaking; but it partakes largely of that depravity which sin has brought upon our whole frame, and affords Satan an avenue for assaulting us with the most terrifying, if not the most dangerous of his temptations. At the best, we have but an indifferent command over it. We cannot, by an act of our own will, exclude a thousand painful, wild, inconsistent, and hurtful ideas, which are ever ready to obtrude themselves upon our minds; and a slight alteration in the animal system, in the motion of the blood or nervous spirit, is sufficient to withdraw it wholly from our dominion, and to leave us like a city without walls or gates, exposed to the incursion of our enemy. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; and, with all our boasted knowledge of other things, can form no conception of what is so vastly interesting to us, the mysterious connection

between soul and body, and the manner in which they are mutually affected by each other. The effects we too sensibly feel. The wisest of men would be accounted fools or mad, were they to express in words a small part of what passes within them; and it would appear that much of the soberest life is little better than a waking dream; but how dreadful are the consequences when the Lord permits some hidden pin in the human machine to be altered! Immediately a door flies open, which no hand but his can shut, and the enemy pours in, like a flood, falsehood and horror, and the blackness of darkness; the judgment is borne down and disabled, and the most distressing illusions seize us with all the apparent force of evidence and demonstration. When this is the case in a certain degree, we call it distraction; but there are various degrees of it, which leave a person in the possession of his senses as to the things of common life, and yet are sufficient, with respect to his spiritual concerns, to shake the very foundations of his hope and deprive him of all peace and comfort, and make him a terror to himself. All the Lord's people are not called to navigate in these deep waters of soul distress; but all are liable. Ah! if we knew what some suffer, the *horribilia de Deo*, and the *terribilia de fide*, which excruciate the minds of those over whom Satan is permitted to tyrannize in this way, surely we should be more earnest and frequent in praying, "Lead us not into temptation." From some little sense I have of the malice and subtlety of our spiritual enemies, and the weakness of those barriers which we have to prevent their assaults, I am fully persuaded that nothing less than the continual exertion of that almighty power which preserves the stars in their orbits, can maintain our peace of mind for an hour or a minute. In this view, all comparative difference in external situations seems to be annihilated; for, as the Lord's presence can make his people happy in a dungeon, so there are temptations which, if we felt them, would instantly render us incapable of receiving a moment's satisfaction from an assemblage of all earthly blessings, and make the company of our dearest friends tasteless, if not insupportable.

Ah! how little do the gay and the busy think of these things! How little indeed do they think of them who profess to believe them! How faint is the sense of our obligations to him, who freely submitted to the fiercest onsets of the powers of darkness, to free us from the punishment due to our sins! otherwise we must have been for ever shut up with those miserable and merciless spirits who delight in our torment, and who, even in the present state, if they get access to our minds, can make our existence a burden.

But our Lord, who knows and considers our weakness, of which we are so little aware, allows and directs us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

We are not to expect an absolute freedom from temptation; we are called to be soldiers, and must sometimes meet with enemies, and perhaps with wounds; yet, considering this prayer as provided by him who knows what we are, and where we are, it may afford us both instruction and consolation.

It calls to a constant reflection upon our own weakness. Believers, especially young ones, are prone to rest too much in grace received. They feel their hearts warm, and, like Peter, are ready to please themselves with thinking how they would act in such or such a state of trial. It is as if the Lord had said, "Poor worms, be not high minded; but fear; and pray, that if it may be, you may be kept from learning, by bitter experience, how weak your supposed strength is." It sweetly intimates, that all our ways, and all our enemies, are in the hands of our great Shepherd. He knows our path. We are short-sighted, and cannot tell what an hour may bring forth; but we are under his protection, and, if we depend upon him, we need not be anxiously afraid. He will be faithful to the trust we repose in him, and will suffer no temptation to overtake us, but what he will support us under and bring us through. But it becomes us to beware of security and presumption, to keep our eyes upon him, and not to think ourselves safe a moment longer than our spirits feel and breathe the meaning of this petition.

It implies, likewise, the duty of watchfulness on our part, as our Lord joins them elsewhere, "Watch and pray." If we desire not to be led into temptation, surely we are not to run into it. If we wish to be preserved from error, we are to guard against a curious and reasoning spirit. If we would preserve peace of conscience, we must beware of trifling with the light and motions of the Holy Spirit; for without his assistance we cannot maintain faith in exercise. If we would not be ensnared by the men of the world, we are to keep at a proper distance from them. The less we have to do with them, the better, excepting so far as the providence of God makes it our duty in the discharge of our callings and relations, and taking opportunities of doing them good. And though we cannot wholly shut Satan out of our imaginations, we should be cautious that we do not wilfully provide fuel for his flame; but entreat the Lord to set a watch upon our eyes and our ears, and to teach us to reject the first motions and the smallest appearance of evil.

I have been so intent upon my subject, that I have once and again forgot I was writing to your Lordship, otherwise I should not have let my lucubration run to so great a length, which I certainly did not intend when I began. I shall not add to this fault, by making an apology. I have touched upon a topic of great importance to myself. I am one among many who have suffered greatly for want of paying more attention to my need of this prayer. O that I

could be wiser hereafter, and always act and speak as knowing that I am always upon a field of battle, and beset by legions!

I am, with great respect, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

September — 1776.

MY LORD,

WITHOUT any preamble, I purpose now to wait on your Lordship, with a few thoughts on the meaning of that name which first obtained at Antioch; in other words, what it is to be a Christian? What are the effects which, making allowance for the unavoidable infirmities attending upon the present state of mortality, may be expected from a real experimental knowledge of the gospel? I would not insinuate that none are christians who do not come up to the character I would describe; for then I fear I should unchristian myself; but only to consider what the scriptures encourage us to aim at, as the prize of our high calling in this life. It is generally allowed and lamented, that we are too apt to live below our privileges, and to stop short of what the spirit and the promises of the gospel point out to us as attainable.

Mr Pope's admired line, "An honest man's the noblest work of God," may be admitted as a truth, when rightly explained. A christian is the noblest work of God in this visible world, and bears a much brighter impression of his glory and goodness than the sun in the firmament; and none but a christian can be strictly and properly honest: all others are too much under the power of self, to do universally to others as they would others should do unto them; and nothing but a uniform conduct upon this principle deserves the name of honesty.

The christian is a new creature, born and taught from above. He has been convinced of his guilt and misery as a sinner, has fled for refuge to the hope set before him, has seen the Son, and believed on him. His natural prejudices against the glory and grace of God's salvation have been subdued and silenced by almighty power: he has accepted the Beloved, and is made acceptable in him. He now knows the Lord: he has renounced the confused, distant, and uncomfortable notions he once formed of God; and beholds him in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, the only door by which we can enter to any true satisfying knowledge of God, or communion with him. But he sees God in Christ reconciled, a Father, a Saviour, and a Friend, who has freely forgiven him all his sins, and given him the spirit of adoption. He is now no longer a servant, much less a stranger, but a son; and because a son, an heir, already interested in all the promises, admitted to the throne of grace, and an assured expectant of eternal glory. The gospel is designed to give us not only a peradventure or a probability, but a certainty, both of our acceptance and our perseverance, till death shall be swallowed up in life.

And though many are sadly fluctuating and perplexed upon this head, and perhaps all are so for a season, yet there are those who can say, we know that we are of God; and therefore they are steadfast and immoveable in his way, because they are confident that their labour shall not be in vain, but that, when they shall be absent from the body, they shall be present with the Lord. This is the state of the advanced experienced christian, who, being enabled to make his profession the chief business of his life, is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Everyone who has this hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as he is pure. I would now attempt a sketch of the christian's temper, formed upon these principles and hopes under the leading branches of its exercise: respecting God, himself, and his fellow-creatures.

The christian's temper God-ward is evidenced by humility. He has received from Gethsemane and Golgotha such a sense of the evil of sin, and of the holiness of God, combined with his matchless love to sinners, as has deeply penetrated his heart: he has an affecting remembrance of the state of rebellion and enmity in which he once lived against this holy and good God; and he has a quick perception of the defilements and defects which still debase his best services. His mouth is therefore stopped as to boasting; he is vile in his own eyes, and is filled with wonder that the Lord should visit such a sinner with such a salvation. He sees so vast a disproportion between the obligations he is under to grace, and the returns he makes, that he is disposed, yea constrained, to adopt the apostle's words without affectation, and to account himself less than the least of all saints; and knowing his own heart, while he sees only the outside of others, he is not easily persuaded there can be a believer upon earth so faint, so unfruitful, so unworthy as himself. Yet, though abased, he is not discouraged, for he enjoys peace. The dignity, offices, blood, righteousness, faithfulness, and compassion of the Redeemer, in whom he rests, trusts, and lives, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, are adequate to all his wants and wishes, provide him with an answer to every objection, and give him no less confidence in God, than if he were sinless as an angel: for he sees, that though sin has abounded in him, grace has much more abounded in Jesus. With respect to the past, all things are become new; with respect to the present and future, he leans upon an almighty arm, and relies upon the word and power which made and upholds the heavens and the earth. Though he feels himself unworthy of the smallest mercies, he claims and expects the greatest blessings that God can bestow; and being rooted and grounded in the knowledge and love of Christ, his peace abides, and is not greatly affected, either by the

variation of his own frames, or the changes of God's dispensations towards him while here. With such a sense of himself, such a heartfelt peace and heavenly hope, how can his spirit but breathe love to his God and Saviour? It is indeed the perfection of his character and happiness, that his soul is united by love to the chief good. The love of Christ is the joy of his heart, and the spring of his obedience. With his Saviour's presence, he finds a heaven begun upon earth; and without it, all the other glories of the heavenly state would not content him. The excellence of Christ, his love to sinners especially his dying love; his love to himself in seeking and saving him when lost, saving him to the utmost—But I must stop.—Your Lordship can better conceive than I can describe, how and why Jesus is dear to the heart that knows him. That part of the christian's life which is not employed in the active service of his Lord, is chiefly spent in seeking and maintaining communion with him. For this he plies the throne, and studies the word of grace, and frequents the ordinances, where the Lord has promised to meet with his people. These are his golden hours; and when thus employed, how poor and trivial does all that the world calls great and important appear in his eyes! Yea, he is solicitous to keep up an intercourse of heart with his Beloved in his busiest scenes; and so far as he can succeed, it alleviates all his labours, and sweetens all his troubles. And when he is neither communing with his Lord, nor acting for him, he accounts his time lost, and is ashamed and grieved. The truth of his love is manifested by submission. This is twofold and absolute, and without reserve in each. He submits to his revealed will, as made known to him by precept and by his own example. He aims to tread in all his Saviour's footsteps, and makes conscience of all his commandments, without exception and without hesitation. Again, he submits to his providential will: he yields to his sovereignty, acquiesces in his wisdom; he knows he has no right to complain of anything, because he is a sinner; and he has no reason, because he is sure the Lord does all things well. Therefore this submission is not forced, but is an act of trust. He knows he is not more unworthy than he is unable to choose for himself, and therefore rejoices that the Lord has undertaken to manage for him; and were he compelled to make his own choice, he could only choose, that all his concerns should remain in that hand to which he has already committed them. And thus he judges of public as well as of his personal affairs. He cannot be an unaffected spectator of national sins, nor without apprehension of their deserved consequences. He feels, and almost trembles for others, but he himself dwells under the shadow of the Almighty, in a sanctuary that cannot be forced; and therefore, should he see the earth shaken, and the mountains cast

into the midst of the sea, his heart would not be greatly moved, for God is his refuge. The Lord reigns. He sees his Saviour's hands directing every dark appearance, and over-ruling all to the accomplishment of his own great purposes: this satisfies him, and though the winds and waves should be high, he can venture his own little bark in the storm, for he has an infallible and almighty pilot on board with him. And indeed, why should he fear when he has nothing to lose? His best concerns are safe; and other things he holds as gifts from his Lord, to whose call is ready to resign them, in whatever way he pleases; well knowing, that creatures and instruments cannot of themselves touch a hair of his head without his Lord's permission, and that if he does permit them, it must be for the best.

I might enlarge farther.—But I shall proceed to consider the christian's temper respecting himself. He lives godly and soberly. By sobriety we mean more than that he is not a drunkard; his tempers towards God of course form him to a moderation in all temporal things. He is not scrupulous or superstitious; he understands the liberty of the gospel, that every creature of God is good if it be received with thanksgiving. He does not aim at being needlessly singular, nor practise self-devised austerities. The christian is neither a Stoic nor a Cynic; yet he finds daily cause for watchfulness and restraint. Satan will not often tempt a believer to gross crimes: our greatest snares and sorest conflicts are usually found in things lawful in themselves, but hurtful to us by their abuse, engrossing too much of our time, or of our hearts, or somehow indisposing us for communion with the Lord. The christian will be jealous of anything that might entangle his affections, damp his zeal, or straiten him in his opportunities of serving his Saviour. He is likewise content with his situation, because the Lord chooses it for him; his spirit is not eager for additions and alterations in his circumstances. If divine providence points out and leads to a change, he is ready to follow, though it should be what the world would call from a better to a worse; for he is a pilgrim and a stranger here, and a citizen of heaven. As people of fortune sometimes, in travelling, submit cheerfully to inconvenient accommodations, very different from their homes, and comfort themselves with thinking they are not always to live so; so the christian is not greatly solicitous about externals. If he has them, he will use them moderately. If he has but little of them, he can make a good shift without them: he is but upon a journey, and will soon be at home. If he be rich, experience confirms our Lord's words, Luke xii. 15.; and satisfies him, that a large room, a crowd of servants, and twenty dishes upon his table, add nothing to the real happiness of life. Therefore he will not have his heart set upon such things. If he be in a humbler state, he is

more disposed to pity than to envy those above him; for he judges they must have many encumbrances from which he is freed. However, the will of God, and the light of his countenance, are the chief things the christian, whether rich or poor, regards; and therefore his moderation is made known unto all men.

A third branch of the christian's temper respects his fellow-creatures. And here, methinks, if I had not filled a sheet already, I could enlarge with pleasure. We have in this degenerate day, among those who claim and are allowed the name of Christian, too many of a narrow, selfish, mercenary spirit; but in the beginning it was not so. The gospel is designed to cure such a spirit, but gives no indulgence to it. A christian has the mind of Christ, who went about doing good, who makes his sun to shine upon the good and the evil, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. His Lord's example forms him to the habit of diffusive benevolence; he breathes a spirit of good will to mankind, and rejoices in every opportunity of being useful to the souls and bodies of others, without respect to parties or interests. He commiserates, and would if possible alleviate the miseries of all around him; and if his actual services are restrained by want of ability, yet all share in his sympathy and prayers. Acting in the spirit of his Master, he frequently meets with a measure of the like treatment: but if his good is requited with evil, he labours to overcome evil with good. He feels himself a sinner, and needs much forgiveness: this makes him ready to forgive. He is not haughty, captious, easily offended, or hard to be reconciled; for at the feet of Jesus he has learned meekness. And when he meets with unkindness or injustice, he considers, that though he has not deserved such things from men, they are instruments employed by his heavenly Father (from whom he has deserved to suffer much more), for his humiliation and chastisement; and is therefore more concerned for their sins than for his own sufferings, and prays, after the pattern of his Saviour, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He knows he is fallible; therefore cannot be positive. He knows he is frail; and therefore dares not be censorious. As a member of society, he is just, punctual in the discharge of every relative duty, faithful to his engagements and promises, rendering to all their dues, obedient to lawful authority, and acting to all men according to the golden rule, of doing as he would be done by. His conduct is simple, devoid of artifice, and consistent, attending to every branch of duty: and in the closet, the family, the church, and the transactions of common life, he is the same man; for in every circumstance he serves the Lord, and aims to maintain a conscience void of offence in his sight. No small part of the beauty of his profession in the sight of men, con-

sists in the due government of his tongue. The law of truth, and kindness, and purity, is upon his lips. He abhors lying; and is so far from inventing a slander, that he will not repeat a report to the disadvantage of his neighbour, however true, without a proper call. His converse is cheerful, but inoffensive; and he will no more wound another with his wit (if he has a talent that way) than with a knife. His speech is with grace, seasoned with salt, and suited to promote the peace and edification of all around him.

Such is the christian in civil life; but though he loves all mankind, he stands in a nearer relation, and bears an especial brotherly love, to all who are partakers of the faith and hope of the gospel. This regard is not confined within the pale of a denomination, but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He calls no man master himself; nor does he wish to impose a Shibboleth of his own upon others. He rejoices in the image of God, wherever he sees it, and in the work of God, wherever it is carried on. Though tenacious of the truths which the Lord has taught him, his heart is open to those who differ from him in less essential points, and allows to others that right of private judgment which he claims for himself, and is disposed to hold communion in love with all who hold the Head. He cannot, indeed, countenance those who set aside the one foundation which God has laid in Zion, and maintain errors derogatory to the honour of his Saviour, or subversive of the faith and experience of his people; yet he wishes well to their persons, pities and prays for them, and is ready in meekness to instruct them that oppose: but there is no bitterness in his zeal, being sensible that raillery and invective are dishonourable to the cause of truth, and quite unsuitable in the mouth of a sinner, who owes all that distinguishes him from the vilest of men to the free grace of God. In a word, he is influenced by the wisdom from above, which, as it is pure, is likewise peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I must just recur to my first head, and observe, that with this spirit and deportment, the christian, while he is enabled to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and man, is still sensible and mindful of indwelling sin. He has his eye more upon his rule than upon his attainments; and therefore finds and confesses, that in everything he comes exceedingly short, and that his best services are not only defective, but defiled. He accounts himself an unprofitable servant, is abased in his own eyes, and derives all his hope and comfort, as well as his strength, from Jesus, whom he has known, received, and trusted, to whom he has committed his soul, in whom he rejoices, and worships God in the spirit, renouncing all confidence in the flesh,

and esteeming all things as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

If I have lately been rather tardy in making my payments to your Lordship, I have proportionably increased the quantity. It is high time I should now relieve your patience. I hope I long to be a christian indeed; and hope this hasty exemplification of my wishes will answer to your Lordship's experience better than I fear it does to my own. May I beg a remembrance in your prayers, that he who has given me to will and desire, may work in me to be and to do according to his own good pleasure.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXV.

November — 1776.

MY LORD,

MY LONDON journey, which prevented my writing in October, made me amends by an opportunity of waiting upon your Lordship in person. Such seasons are not only pleasant at the time, but afford me pleasure in the review. I could have wished the half-hour we were together by ourselves prolonged to half a day. The subject your Lordship was pleased to suggest has been often upon my mind; and glad should I be, were I able to offer you anything satisfactory upon it. There is no doubt but first religious impressions are usually mingled with much of a legal spirit; and that conscience at such a time is not only tender, but misinformed and scrupulous; and I believe, as your Lordship intimated, that when the mind is more enlightened, and we feel a liberty from many fetters we had impaled upon ourselves, we are in danger of verging too far towards the other extreme. It seems to me that no one person can adjust the medium, and draw the line exactly for another. There are so many particulars in every situation, of which a stranger cannot be a competent judge, and the best human advices and models are mixed with such defects, that it is not right to expect others to be absolutely guided by our rules, nor is it safe for us implicitly to adopt the decisions or practices of others. But the scriptures undoubtedly furnish sufficient and infallible rules for every person, however circumstanced; and the throne of grace is appointed for us to wait upon the Lord for the best exposition of his precepts. Thus David often prays to be led in the right way, in the path of judgment. By frequent prayer, and close acquaintance with the scriptures, and an habitual attention to the frame of our hearts, there is a certain delicacy of spiritual taste and discernment to be acquired, which renders a nice disquisition concerning the nature and limits of the *adiaphora*, as they are called, or how near we may go to the utmost bounds of what is right, without being wrong, quite unnecessary. Love is the clearest and most persuasive casuist; and when our love to the Lord is in lively exercise, and the rule of his word is in our eye, we seldom make great mistakes. And I believe the overdoings of a young convert, proceeding from an honest simplicity of heart, and a desire of pleasing the Lord, are more acceptable in his sight, than a certain coolness of conduct which frequently takes place afterwards, when we are apt to look back with pity upon our former weakness, and secretly to applaud ourselves for our present greater attainments in know-

ledge, though perhaps (alas that it should ever be so!) we may have lost as much in warmth as we have gained in light.

From the time we know the Lord, and are bound to him by the cords of love and gratitude, the two chief points we should have in our view, I apprehend, are, to maintain communion with him in our own souls, and to glorify him in the sight of men. Agreeably to these views, though the scriptures do not enumerate or decide, *totidem verbis*, for or against many things which some plead for, and others condemn; yet they furnish us with some general canons, which, if rightly applied, will perhaps go a good way towards settling the debate, at least to the satisfaction of those who would rather please God than man. Some of these canons I will just mark to your Lordship:—Rom. xii. 1, 2; 1 Cor. viii. 13. and x. 31; 2 Cor. vi. 17; Ephes. iv. 30; Ephes. v. 11, 15, 16; 1 Thes. v. 22; Ephes. vi. 18.; to which I may add, as suitable to the present times, Isa. xxii. 12. Luke xxi. 34. I apprehend the spirit of these and similar passages of scripture (for it would be easy to adduce a larger number) will bring a christian under such restrictions as follow:

To avoid and forbear, for his own sake, whatever has a tendency to damp and indispose his spirit in attendance upon the means of grace; for such things, if they be not condemned as sinful *per se*, if they be not absolutely unlawful, yea though they be, when duly regulated, lawful and right (for often our chief snares are entwined with our blessings); yet if they have a repeated and evident tendency to deaden our hearts to divine things, of which each person's experience must determine, there must be something in them, either in season, measure, or circumstance, wrong to us; and let them promise what they will, they do but rob us of our gold to pay us with counters. For the light of God's countenance, and an open cheerfulness of spirit in walking with him in private, is our chief joy; and we must be already greatly hurt, if anything can be pursued, allowed, or rested in, as a tolerable substitute for it.

For the sake of the church, and the influence example may have upon his fellow-christians, the law of charity and prudence will often require a believer to abstain from some things, not because they are unlawful, but inexpedient. Thus the apostle, though strenuous for the right of his christian liberty, would have abridged himself of the use, so as to eat no flesh, rather than offend a weak brother, rather than mislead him to act against the present light of his conscience. Upon this principle, if I could, without hurt to myself, attend some public amusements, as a concert or oratorio, and return from thence with a warm heart to my closet (the possibility of which in my

own case I greatly question); yet I should think it my duty to forbear, lest some weaker than myself should be encouraged by me to make the like experiment, though in their own minds they might fear it was wrong, and have no other reason to think it lawful but because I did it; in which case, I should suspect, that though I received no harm, they would. And I have known and conversed with some, who I fear have made shipwreck of their profession, who have dated their first decline from imitating others, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves, in such kind of compliances. And it seems that an obligation to this sort of self-denial rises and is strengthened in proportion to the weight and influence of our characters. Were I in private life, I do not know that I should think it sinful to kill a partridge or a hare; but, as a minister, I no more dare do it than I dare join in a drunken frolic, because I know it would give offence to some, and be pleaded for as a licence by others.

There is a duty, and a charity likewise, which we owe to the world at large, as well as a faithfulness to God and his grace, in our necessary converse among them. This seems to require, that though we should not be needlessly singular, yet, for their instruction, and for the honour of our Lord and Master, we should keep up a certain kind of singularity, and show ourselves called to be a separated people;—that though the providence of God has given us callings and relations to fill up (in which we cannot be too exact), yet we are not of the world, but belong to another community, and act from other principles, by other rules, and to other ends, than the generality of those about us. I have observed, that the world will often leave professors in quiet possession of their notions and sentiments, and places of worship, provided they will not be too stiff in the matter of conformity with their more general customs and amusements. But I fear many of them have had their prejudices strengthened against our holy religion by such compliances, and have thought, that if there were such joy and comfort to be found in the ways of God as they hear from our pulpits, professors would not, in such numbers, and so often, run amongst them, to beg a relief from the burden of time hanging upon their hands. As our Lord Jesus is the great representative of his people in heaven, he does them the honour to continue a succession of them as his representatives upon earth. Happy are they who are favoured with most of the holy unction, and best enabled to manifest to all around them by their spirit, tempers, and conversation, what is the proper design and genuine effect of his gospel upon the hearts of sinners.

In our way of little life in the country, serious people often complain of the snares they meet with from worldly people, and yet they must mix with

them to get a livelihood. I advise them, if they can, to do their business with the world as they do it in the rain. If their business calls them abroad, they will not leave it undone for fear of being a little wet; but then, when it is done, they presently seek shelter, and will not stand in the rain for pleasure: so providential and necessary calls of duty, that lead us into the world, will not hurt us, if we find the spirit of the world unpleasant, and are glad to retire from it, and keep out of it as much as our relative duties will permit. That which is our cross is not so likely to be our snare; but if that spirit, which we should always watch and pray against, infects and assimilates our minds to itself, then we are sure to suffer loss, and act below the dignity of our profession.

The value of time is likewise to be taken into the account. It is a precious talent, and our Christian profession opens a wide field for the due improvement of it. Much of it has been already lost, and therefore we are exhorted to redeem it. I think many things which custom pleads for will be excluded from a suitableness to a Christian, for this one reason, that they are not consistent with the simplest notion of the redemption of time. It is generally said, we need relaxation: I allow it in a sense: the Lord himself has provided it; and because our spirits are too weak to be always upon the wing in meditation and prayer, he has appointed to all men, from the king downwards, something to do in a secular way. The poor are to labour, the rich are not exempted from something equivalent. And when everything of this sort in each person's situation is properly attended to, I apprehend, if the heart be alive and in a right state, spiritual concerns will present themselves, as affording the noblest, sweetest, and most interesting relaxation from the cares and business of life; as on the other hand, that business will be the best relaxation and unbending of the mind from religious exercises; and between the two, perhaps there ought to be but little mere leisure time. A life in this sense, divided between God and the world, is desirable; when one part of it is spent in retirement, seeking after and conversing with him whom our souls love; and the other part of it employed in active services for the good of our family, friends, the church, and society, forsake. Every hour which does not fall in with one or other of these views, I apprehend, is lost time.

The day in which we live seems likewise to call for something of a peculiar spirit in the Lord's people. It is a day of abounding sin, and, I fear, a day of impending judgment. The world, as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, is secure. We are soon to have a day of apparent humiliation; but the just causes for it are not confined to one day, but will subsist, and to probably increase, every day. If I am not mistaken in the signs of the times, there

never was, within the annals of the English history, a period in which the spirit and employment described, Ezek. ix. 4, could be employment more suitable than the present. The Lord calls for mourning and weeping; but the words of many are stout against him. New species of dissipation are invented almost daily, and the language of those who bear the greatest sway in what is called the polite circle, I mean the interpretative language of their hearts, is like that of the rebellious Jews, Jer. xliv. 16, 17, &c. "As for the word which thou hast spoken, we will not hearken unto thee at all." In short, things are coming to a point, and it seems to be almost putting to the vote, whether the Lord or Baal be God. In this state of affairs, methinks, we cannot be too explicit in avowing our attachment to the Lord, nor too careful in avoiding an improper correspondence with those who are in confederacy against him. We know not how soon we may greatly need that mark of providential protection which is restrained to those who sigh and cry for our abominations. Upon the whole, it appears to me, that it is more honourable, comfortable, and safe (if we cannot exactly hit the golden mean), to be thought by some too scrupulous and precise, than actually to be found too compliant with those things which, if not absolutely contrary to a divine commandment, are hardly compatible with the genius of the gospel, or conformable to the mind that was in Christ Jesus, which ought also to be in his people. The places and amusements which the world frequent and admire, where occasions and temptations to sin are cultivated, where the law of what is called good breeding is the only law which may not be violated with impunity, where sinful passions are provoked and indulged, where the fear of God is so little known or regarded, that those who do fear him must hold their tongues, though they should hear his name blasphemed, can hardly be a christian's voluntary chosen ground. Yet I fear these characters will apply to every kind of polite amusement or assembly in the kingdom.

As to family connexions, I cannot think we are bound to break or slight them. But as believers and their friends often live as it were in two elements, there is a mutual awkwardness, which makes their interviews rather dry and tedious. But, upon that account, they are less frequent than they would otherwise be, which seems an advantage. Both sides keep up returns of civility and affection; but as they cannot unite in sentiment and leading inclination, they will not contrive to be very often together, except there is something considerable given up by one or the other; and I think christians ought to be very cautious what concessions they make upon this account. But, as I said at the beginning, no general positive rules can be laid down.

I have simply given your Lordship such thoughts as have occurred to me while writing, without study, and without coherence. I dare not be dogmatical; but I think what I have written is agreeable both to particular texts, and to the general tenor of scripture. I submit it to your judgment.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

July — 1777 .

MY LORD,

I OWE your Lordship a quire of letters for the favour and pleasure of your late visit; and therefore I must begin and write away.

I have lately read Robertson's History of Charles V., which, like most other histories, I consider as a comment upon those passages of scripture which teach us the depravity of man, the deceitfulness of the heart, the ruinous effects of sin, and the powerful, though secret rule of divine providence, moving, directing, and controlling the designs and actions of men, with an unerring hand, to the accomplishment of his own purposes, both of mercy and judgment. Without the clue and the light which the word of God affords, the history of mankind, of any, of every age, only presents to view a labyrinth and a chaos; a detail of wickedness and misery to make us tremble, and a confused jumble of interfering incidents, as destitute of stability, connection, or order, as the clouds which fly over our heads. In this view, *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi*, may serve as a motto to all the histories I have seen; but, with the scripture key, all is plain, all is instructive. Then I see verily there is a God, who governs the earth, who pours contempt upon princes, takes the wise in their own craftiness, over-rides the wrath and pride of man, to bring his own designs to pass, and restrains all that is not necessary to that end; blasting the best concerted enterprises at one time, by means apparently slight, and altogether unexpected, and at other times producing the most important events, from instruments and circumstances which are, at first thought, too feeble and trivial to deserve notice. I should like to see a writer of Dr. Robertson's abilities give us a history upon this plan; but I think his reflections of this sort are too general, too cold, and too few. What an empty phantom do the great men of the world pursue, while they wage war with the peace of mankind, and butcher, in the course of their lives, perhaps hundreds of thousands, to maintain the shadow of authority over distant nations, whom they can reach with no other influence than that of oppression and devastation! But when we consider those who are sacrificed to their ambition, as justly suffering for their sins, then heroes and conquerors appear in their proper light, and worthy to be classed with earthquakes and pestilences, as instruments of divine vengeance. So many cares, so much pains, so many mischiefs,—merely to support the idea a worm has formed of his own grandeur, is a proof that man, by nature, is not only de-

praved, but infatuated. Permit me to present my thoughts to more advantage in the words of M. Nicole:

“Un grand dans son idée n’est pas un seul homme; c’est un homme environ de tous ceux qui sont à lui, et qui s’imagine avoir autant de bras qu’ils en ont tous ensemble, parce qu’il en dispose et qu’il les remue. Un general d’armée se represente toujours à lui-même au milieu de tous ses soldats. Ainsi chacun tâche d’occuper le plus de place qu’il peut dans son imagination, et l’on ne se pousse, et ne s’aggrandit dans le monde, que pour augmenter l’idée que chacun se forme de soi-même. Voila le but de tous les desseins ambitieux des hommes! Alexandre et Caesar n’ont point eu d’autre vûe dans toutes leurs batailles que celle-là. Et si l’on demande pourquoi le Grand Seigneur a fait depuis peu perir cent mille hommes devant Candie, on peut repondre surement, que ce n’est que pour attacher encore à cette image interieure qu’il a de lui-même, le titre de conquerant.”¹

How awful is the case of those who live and die in such a spirit, and who have multiplied miseries upon their fellow-creatures, in order to support and feed it! Perhaps they may, upon their entrance on another state, be accosted by multitudes, to the purport of that sarcastical language in the prophet’s sublime ode of triumph over the king of Babylon, Is. xiv. 5-17.

Hic est, quern fuga, quem pavor
Præcessit? hic, quern terricolis gravis
Strages secuta est, vastitasque? hic
Attoniti spoliator orbis?

But though the effects of this principle of self are more extensive and calamitous, in proportion as those who are governed by it are more elevated, the principle itself is deep-rooted in every heart, and is the spring of every action, till grace infuses a new principle, and self, like Dagon, falls before the Lord of Hosts. Great and small are but relative terms; and the passions of discontent, pride, and envy, which, in the breast of a potentate, are severely felt by one half of Europe, exert themselves with equal strength in the heart of a peasant, though, for want of materials and opportunities, their operations are confined within narrow bounds. We are fallen into a state of gross idolatry, and self is the idol we worship.

I am, &c.

¹ Essais de Morale, vol. i.