

THE
WORKS
OF
THE REV. JOHN NEWTON

LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF
ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH-HAW,
LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

CONTAINING
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED
MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

EDINBURGH

Printed at the University Press, for

PETER BROWN AND THOMAS NELSON.

1830.

LETTER X.

A; OR, GRACE IN THE BLADE. MARK IV. 28.

DEAR SIR,

ACCORDING to your desire, I sit down to give you my general views of a progressive work of grace, in the several stages of a believer's experience, which I shall mark by the different characters, A, B, C, answerable to the distinctions our Lord teaches us to observe from the growth of the corn, Mark iv. 28. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The Lord leads all his people effectually and savingly to the knowledge of the same essential truths, but in such a variety of methods, that it will be needful, in this disquisition, to set aside, as much as possible, such things as may be only personal and occasional in the experience of each, and to collect those only which, in a greater or less degree, are common to them all. I shall not, therefore, give you a copy of my own experience, or of that of any individual; but shall endeavour, as clearly as I can, to state what the scripture teaches us concerning the nature and essentials of a work of grace, so far as it will bear a general application to all those who are the subjects of gracious operations.

By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins, not only strangers to God, but in a state of enmity and opposition to his government and grace. In this respect, whatever difference there may be in the characters of men as members of society, they are all, whether wise or ignorant, whether sober or profane, equally incapable of receiving or approving divine truths, 1 Cor. ii. 14. On this ground our Lord declares, "No man can come unto me, except the Father who has sent me draws him." Though the term Father most frequently expresses a known and important distinction in the adorable Trinity, I apprehend our Lord sometimes uses it, to denote God, or the Divine Nature, in contradistinction from his humanity, as in John xiv. 9. And this I take to be the sense here: "No man can come unto me, unless he is taught of God," and wrought upon by a divine power. The immediate exertion of this power, according to the economy of salvation, is rather ascribed to the Holy Spirit than to the Father, John xvi. 8-11. But it is the power of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore severally attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit, John v. 21, and ch. vi. 44, 63; 2 Cor. iii. 18; 2 Thes. iii. 5.

By A, I would understand a person who is under the drawings of God, which will infallibly lead him to the Lord Jesus Christ, for life and salvation. The beginning of this work is instantaneous. It is effected by a certain kind

of light communicated to the soul, to which it was before an utter stranger. The eyes of the understanding are opened and enlightened. The light at first afforded is weak and indistinct, like the morning dawn; but when it is once begun, it will certainly increase and spread to the perfect day. We commonly speak as if conviction of sin was the first work of God upon the soul that he is in mercy about to draw unto himself. But I think this is inaccurate. Conviction is only a part, or rather an immediate effect of that first work; and there are many convictions which do not at all spring from it, and therefore are only occasional and temporary, though for a season they may be very sharp, and put a person upon doing many things. In order to a due conviction of sin, we must previously have some adequate conceptions of the God with whom we have to do. Sin may be feared as dangerous without this; but its nature and demerit can only be understood by being contrasted with the holiness, majesty, goodness, and truth, of the God against whom it is committed. No outward means, no mercies, judgments, or ordinances, can communicate such a discovery of God, or produce such a conviction of sin, without the concurrence of this divine light and power to the soul. The natural conscience and passions may indeed be so far wrought upon by outward means, as to stir up some desires and endeavours; but if these are not founded in a spiritual apprehension of the perfections of God, according to the revelation he has made of himself in his word, they will sooner or later come to nothing; and the person affected will either return by degrees to his former ways, 2 Peter ii. 20, or he will sink into a self-righteous form of godliness, destitute of the power, Luke xviii. 11. And therefore, as there are so many things in the dispensation of the gospel suited to work upon the natural passions of men, the many woeful miscarriages and apostasies amongst professors are more to be lamented than wondered at. For though the seed may seem to spring up, and look green for a season, if there be not depth for it to take root, it will surely wither away. We may be unable to judge with certainty upon the first appearance of a religious profession, whether the work be thus deep and spiritual, or not; but “the Lord knows them that are his;” and wherever it is real, it is an infallible token of salvation. Now, as God only thus reveals himself by the medium of scripture-truth, the light received this way leads the soul to the scripture from whence it springs, and all the leading truths of the word of God soon begin to be perceived and assented to. The evil of sin is acknowledged, the evil of the heart is felt. There may be for a while some efforts to obtain the favour of God by prayer, repentance, and reformation; but for the most part it is not very long before these things are proved to be vain and ineffectual. The soul, like the woman mentioned Mark v. 26, wearied with vain expedients, finds itself worse and

worse, and is gradually brought to see the necessity and sufficiency of the gospel-salvation. A man may soon be a believer thus far: That he believes the word of God, sees and feels things to be as they are thus described, hates and avoids sin, because he knows it is displeasing to God, and contrary to his goodness; he receives the record which God has given of his Son; has his heart affected and drawn to Jesus by views of his glory, and of his love to poor sinners; ventures upon his name and promises as his only encouragement to come to a throne of grace; waits diligently in the use of all means appointed for the communion and growth of grace; loves the Lord's people, accounts them the excellent of the earth, and delights in their conversation. He is longing, waiting, and praying for a share in those blessings which he believes they enjoy, and can be satisfied with nothing less. He is convinced of the power of Jesus to save him; but, through remaining ignorance and legality, the remembrance of sin committed, and the sense of present corruption, he often questions his willingness; and, not knowing the abounding of grace, and the security of the promises, he fears lest the compassionate Saviour should spurn him from his feet.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of the gospel, burdened with sin, and, perhaps, beset with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom," is pleased, at times, to favour him with cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged in prayer, or under hearing, or some good promise is brought home to his mind, and applied with power and sweetness. He mistakes the nature and design of these comforts, which are not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to press forward. He thinks he is then right, because he has them, and fondly hopes to have them always. Then his mountain stands strong. But ere long he feels a change; his comforts are withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray; no attention in hearing; indwelling sin revives with fresh strength, and, perhaps, Satan returns with redoubled rage. Then he is at his wit's end: thinks his hopes were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions. He wants to feel something that may give him a warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ. His views of the Redeemer's gracefulness are very narrow; he sees not the harmony and glory of the divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner; he sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against him. However, by these changing dispensations, the Lord is training him up, and bringing him forward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby he is enabled to fight against sin; his conscience is tender; his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles; and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and abiding sense of his acceptance in the Beloved, hardly any outward trial would be capable of giving him much disturbance. Indeed,

notwithstanding the weakness of his faith, and the prevalence of a legal spirit, which greatly hurts him, there are some things in his present experience which he may, perhaps, look back upon with regret hereafter, when his hope and knowledge will be more established. Particularly that sensibility and keenness of appetite with which he now attends the ordinances, desiring the sincere milk of the word with earnestness and eagerness as a babe does the breast. He counts the hours from one opportunity to another; and the attention and desire with which he hears may be read in his countenance. His zeal is like-wise lively; and may be for want of more experience, too importunate and forward. He has a love for souls, and a concern for the glory of God, which, though it may at some times create him trouble, and at others be mixed with some undue motions of self, yet in its principle is highly desirable and commendable, John xviii. 10.

The grace of God influences both the understanding and the affections. Warm affections, without knowledge can rise no higher than superstition; and that knowledge which does not influence the heart and affections, will only make a hypocrite. The true believer is rewarded in both respects; yet we may observe, that though A is not without knowledge, this state is more usually remarkable for the warmth and liveliness of the affections. On the other hand, as the work advances, though the affections are not left out, yet it seems to be carried on principally in the understanding. The old Christian has more solid, judicious, and connected views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glories of his person and redeeming love; hence his hope is more established, his dependence more simple, and his peace and strength, *cæteris paribus*, more abiding and uniform, than in the case of a young convert; but the latter has, for the most part, the advantage in point of sensible fervency. A tree is most valuable when laden with ripe fruit; but it has a peculiar beauty when in blossom. It is springtime with A; he is in bloom, and, by the grace and blessing of the heavenly husbandman, will bear fruit in old age. His faith is weak, but his heart is warm. He will seldom venture to think himself a believer; but he sees and feels, and does those things which no one could, unless the Lord was with him. The very desire and bent of his soul is to *God*, and to the word of his grace. His knowledge is but small; but it is growing every day. If he is not a father or a young man in grace, he is a clear child. The Lord has visited his heart, delivered him from the love of sin, and fixed his desires supremely upon Jesus Christ. The spirit of bondage is gradually departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which he longs for is approaching, when, by a further discovery of the glorious gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the Lord's finished salvation. We shall then take notice of him by the name of B in a second

letter, if you are not unwilling that I should prosecute the subject.

I am, &c.