

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 XXXVI.

TO A GAY FRIEND, ON HIS RECOVERY FROM ILLNESS.

DEAR SIR,

I SUPPOSE you will receive many congratulations on your recovery from your late dangerous illness; most of them, perhaps, more sprightly and better turned, but none, I persuade myself, more sincere and affectionate than mine. I beg you would prepare yourself by this good opinion of me, before you read further; and let the reality of my regard excuse what you may dislike in my manner of expressing it.

When a person is returned from a doubtful, distant voyage, we are naturally led to inquire into the incidents he has met with, and the discoveries he has made. Indulge me in a curiosity of this kind, especially as my affection gives me an interest and concern in the event. You have been, my friend, upon the brink, the very edge of an eternal state; but God has restored you back to the world again. Did you meet with, or have you brought back, nothing new? Did nothing occur to stop or turn your usual train of thought? Were your apprehensions of invisible things exactly the same in the height of your disorder, when you were cut off from the world and all its engagements, as when you were in perfect health, and in the highest enjoyment of your own inclinations? If you answer me, "Yes, all things are just the same as formerly, the difference between sickness and health only excepted;" I am at a loss how to reply. I can only sigh and wonder: sigh, that it should be thus with any, that it should be thus with you, whom I dearly love; and wonder, since this unhappy case, strange as it seems in one view, is yet so frequent, why it was not always thus with myself; for long and often it was just so. Many a time, when sickness had brought me, as we say, to death's door, I was as easy and insensible as the sailor, who, in the height of a storm, should presume to sleep upon the top of the mast, quite regardless, that the next tossing wave might plunge him into the raging ocean, beyond all possibility of relief. But at length a day came, which, though the most terrible day I ever saw, I can now look back upon with thankfulness and pleasure; I say, the time came, when, in such a helpless extremity, and under the expectation of immediate death, it pleased God to command the veil from my eyes, and I saw things in some measure as they really were. Imagine with yourself, a person trembling upon the point of a dreadful precipice, a powerful and inexorable enemy eager to push him down, and an assemblage of all that is horrible waiting at the bottom for his fall; even this will give you but a faint representation of the state of my mind at that time. Believe me, it was not a whim, or a dream, which changed my sentiments and conduct, but a powerful conviction, which will

not admit the least doubt; an evidence which, like that I have of my own existence, I cannot call in question, without contradicting all my senses. And though my case was in some respects uncommon, yet something like it is known by one and another every day; and I have myself conversed with many, who, after a course of years spent in defending deistical principles, or indulging libertine practices, when they have thought themselves confirmed in their schemes by the cool assent of what they then deemed impartial reason, have been, like me, brought to glory in the cross of Christ, and to live by that faith which they had before slighted and opposed. By these instances, I know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. The same power which humbled me, can undoubtedly bring down the most haughty infidel upon earth. And as I likewise knew, that, to show his power, he is often pleased to make use of weak instruments. I am encouraged, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty of succeeding, to warn those, over whom friendship or affection gives me any influence, of the evil and the danger of a course of life formed upon the prevailing maxims of the world. So far as I neglect this, I am unfaithful in my professions, both to God and man.

I shall not at present trouble you in an argumentative way. If by dint of reasoning I could effect some change in your notions, my arguments, unless applied by a superior power, would still leave your heart unchanged and untouched. A man may give his assent to the gospel, and be able to defend it against others, and yet not have his own spirit truly influenced by it. This thought I shall leave with you, that if your scheme be not true to a demonstration, it must necessarily be false; for the issue is too important to make a doubt on the dangerous side tolerable. If the christian could possibly be mistaken, he is still upon equal terms with those who pronounce him to be so: but if the deist be wrong (that is, if we are in the right), the consequence to him must be unavoidable and intolerable. This, you will say, is a trite argument: I own it; but, beaten as it is, it will never be worn out or answered.

Permit me to remind you that the points in debate between us are already settled in themselves, and that our talking cannot alter or affect the nature of things, for they will be as they are, whatever apprehensions we may form of them; and remember, likewise, that we must all, each one for himself, experience on which side the truth lies. I used a wrong word when I spoke of your *recovery*: my dear friend, look upon it only as a *reprieve*, for you carry the sentence of death about with you still, and, unless you should be cut off (which God of his mercy forbid!) by a sudden stroke, you will as surely lie upon a deathbed as you have been now raised from a bed of sickness; and remember likewise (how can I bear to write it!) that should you neglect my admonitions, they will, notwithstanding, have an effect upon you, though not such an effect as I could wish: they will render you more

inexcusable. I have delivered my own soul by faithfully warning you: but if you will not examine the matter with that seriousness it calls for; if you will not look up to God, the former of your body and the preserver of your spirit, for direction and assistance how to please him; if you will have your reading and conversation only on one side of the question; if you determine to let afflictions and dangers, mercies and deliverances, all pass without reflection and improvement; if you will spend your life as though you thought you were sent into the world only to eat, sleep, and play, and, after a course of years, be extinguished like the snuff of a candle;—why, then, you must abide the consequences. But assuredly, sooner or later, God will meet you. My hearty daily prayer is, that it may be in a way of mercy, and that you may be added to the number of the trophies of his invincible grace.

I am, &c.