

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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## LETTER XLI.

### ON THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS.

DEAR SIR,

THE saints on earth, though exposed to many sufferings, and assaulted by many enemies, are as safe as the saints in glory. They have been enabled, in the day of God's power to commit themselves to the care of Jesus, the great shepherd, who is faithful to his trust, and able to save them to the uttermost. His eye is always upon them, his everlasting arms are underneath them, and no power, or policy, can separate them from his love.

The apostle, in the name and behalf of the church militant, having taken a leisurely and distinct survey of all the difficulties and opposition they can possibly meet with, in life or in death, from the visible or invisible worlds, triumphs in an assurance, that none of these things singly, nor all of them together, shall prevail; but that, on the contrary, believers shall be made conquerors, yea, more than conquerors, through him who has loved them.

In the course of his enumeration of the real or supposed dangers to which the people of Christ are exposed, he particularly mentions, angels, principalities, and powers, intimating to us a subject of great importance, though too seldom and too faintly attended to by us; I mean the part which the inhabitants of the unseen world take in our concerns. Angel is a general name; the terms, principalities and powers, and elsewhere, thrones and dominions, applied to them, we shall not, perhaps, clearly understand, till we mingle with the world of spirits. These different names seem, however, to imply that some difference of degree, and possibly some subordination of rule, obtains among them. But they shall not be able either singly or collectively to separate believers from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

The general distribution of angels, principalities, and powers, is into good and evil. They were all created glorious and excellent creatures; for nothing but good could originally proceed from God, the fountain of goodness. But some of them "kept not their first estate." Sin despoiled them of their glory, and changed them from angels of light into powers of darkness. And though they have a permissive liberty, subservient to the limitations and designs of divine wisdom, to influence the minds, and to interfere in the affairs of mankind; yet they are confined in chains of darkness which they cannot break, and are reserved to the judgment of the great day.

There are likewise an innumerable company of elect or good angels, Rev. iii. 11. who were preserved by sovereign grace, and are now established (together with believers) in Christ Jesus, the great head of the whole family of God, in heaven and in earth. From these, we may be sure,

believers have nothing to fear. They are our brethren and fellow-servants. They join in the song of the redeemed before the throne; and rejoice in the conversion of a sinner upon earth. We cannot include these in the apostle's challenge, any farther than by way of supposition; as he expresses himself upon another occasion, Gal. i. 8. It is not possible that an angel from heaven should preach, if he came to preach, any other gospel than that which is revealed in scripture; but if such a thing could be supposed, we ought not to regard him. So it is not to be thought that the elect angels of God should wish to hinder the salvation of a sinner. But if you conceive for a moment, that any, or all of them could form such a design, they would not be able to succeed; for they are all subject to him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. So far, however, are the holy angels from designing us harm, that they are greatly instrumental in promoting our good. They are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation;" and they rejoice in the service, and account it their honour to be thus employed.

I propose, in this paper, briefly to consider the ministry of good angels; and may, perhaps, hereafter offer a few thoughts on the influence and interference of evil angels, who are continually labouring to disturb and trouble those whom they are not permitted to destroy. And I shall not attempt to amuse the reader with new and strange conjectures upon these subjects, or to intrude into those things which are not revealed, but shall confine myself to the express declarations of the word of God.

The great God works all in all, in both worlds. It is he who filleth the earth with good things, causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and provides corn for the food of man. But in thus spreading a table for us he makes use of instruments. He commands his sun to shine, and his rain to descend. So he is the life, strength, and comfort of the renewed soul. All the streams of grace flow from Christ, the fountain. But, from the analogy observable in his works, we might reasonably suppose, that, on many occasions, he is pleased to use means and instruments, and particularly the ministry of his angels, to communicate good to his children. Scripture expressly confirms this inference, and leaves it no longer a point of mere conjecture. He gives his angels charge over them, and they encamp round about them that fear him. In this way honour is given to Jesus, as the Lord both of angels and men; and a sweet intercourse is kept up between the different parts of the household of God. That angels have been thus employed in fact, is plain from the history both of the Old and New Testament. They have often made themselves visible when sent to declare the will of God; as to Jacob, Elijah, and David. Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and Mary; and a multitude joined in ascribing "glory to God in the highest" when they brought to the shepherds the joyful news of a Saviour's birth. An angel delivered Peter

from prison, and comforted Paul when tossed by a tempest upon the sea. How far the visible ministration of angels is continued in these days is not easy to determine. Many persons have been imposed upon by Satan, through such expectations; and it is not safe to look for extraordinary things; yet I do not know that we have warrant from scripture to limit the Lord, so far as to affirm, that he doth not, nor ever will, upon any occasion, permit his angels to be seen by men, as in former times. The apostle, pressing believers to exercise hospitality, uses this argument, that “thereby some have entertained angels unawares;” which would hardly seem to be a pertinent motive, if it were absolutely certain that angels would never offer themselves as visitants to the servants of God in future times as they had formerly done. But, waving speculations as to their visible appearance, it is sufficient to know that they are really, though invisibly, near us, and mindful of us.

May we not receive assistance from the angels in our spiritual warfare? That evil angels have an influence and power to distress and disquiet us, is well known to exercised souls; and it seems quite reasonable to believe, that the good angels are as willing and as able to communicate helpful and encouraging impressions. As it is not always easy to distinguish between the temptations of Satan and the workings of our own evil hearts; so it may be equally or more difficult to distinguish these assistances from the effects of gracious principles abiding in us, or from the leadings and motions of the Holy Spirit. Nor need we be anxious about it. We cannot err in ascribing all to the Lord. Yet there is something cheering in the thought that we are accompanied and surrounded by these blessed spirits, who have both inclination and ability to relieve, strengthen, and admonish us, in ways which we cannot fully understand. Who can tell how often, and how seasonably, a promise, a caution, a direction, from or agreeable to the word of God, is darted upon our minds by these kind messengers of our Father’s love?

We may warrantably think they are employed in restraining, overruling, and controlling the designs of Satan and his angels. The power, malice, and subtlety of our enemy are very great. We may learn what he would do to us all, if he could, from the instance of Job. But the Lord rebukes him, and that most probably by the ministry of unfallen angels, who are said to encamp round his people to deliver them; and doubtless their care is especially employed where the greatest danger lies. Much to this purpose seems to be implied in the following passages, Dan. x. 13, Rev. xii. 7, Jude 9.

They are witnesses to the sufferings and to the worship of his people, 1 Cor. iv. 9. Though they do not show themselves to us, as heretofore to Peter or Paul, they are still near and attentive, are interested in the conflicts and

rejoice in the victories of a poor believer. They are present likewise in our solemn assemblies; therefore the apostle charges Timothy, as “before the elect angels,” and seems to refer to them in 1 Cor. xi. 10. This reflection should enliven and regulate our thoughts when we come together; for, though the presence of our Lord and Saviour is the great consideration, yet this likewise may, in its proper place, have some influence to compose our behaviour, Heb. xii. 22.

The ministry of angels preserves us from innumerable dangers and alarms which await us in our daily path. This is expressly taught in Psalm xci. When we receive little or no harm from a fall, or when a sudden motion of our minds leads us to avoid a danger which we were not aware of, perhaps the angels of God have been the means of our preservation; nay, it may be owing to their good offices that we ever perform a journey in safety, or are preserved from the evils we are liable to when sleeping upon our beds, and incapable of taking any care of ourselves.

Finally, they are appointed to attend the saints in their last hours, and, in a manner beyond our present apprehension, to keep off the powers of darkness, and bear the children of God safely home to their Father’s house, Luke xvi. 22.

The limits of a sheet will not admit of enlargement upon these particulars. The subject is pleasing and comfortable, and well suited to encourage believers under two very common trials.

1. We are often cast down to think how few there are who worship God in spirit and in truth, and are ready to complain, with Elijah, that we are almost left to serve him alone. But Jesus is not slighted and despised in yonder world as he is in this. If, like the servant of Elisha, our eyes were supernaturally opened to take a glance within the veil, what a glorious and astonishing prospect would the innumerable host of angels afford us! Then we should be convinced that, far from being alone, there are unspeakably more for us than against us. Faith supplies the want of sight, is the evidence of things not seen, and, upon the authority of the word of God, is as well satisfied of their existence and employment as if they were actually in our view.

Again, 2. Many of the Lord’s people are tempted to think themselves neglected by their fellow-christians because they are poor, a discouragement for which there is often too much occasion given. But, poor believer, be not greatly distressed upon this account. If your brethren upon earth are too prone to slight you, your heavenly friends are not so proud and foolish. The angels will attend and assist you, though you live in a poor mud-walled cottage, as willingly as if you were lodged in the palace of a king. They are not affected, one way or the other, with those trivial distinctions which are so apt to bias the judgment and regard of mortals.

May we take a pattern from the angels! Their whole desire is to fulfil the will of God, and they account no service mean in which he is pleased to employ them, otherwise, great and holy as they are, they might disdain to wait upon sinful worms. Our vanity prompts us to aim at something great, and to wish for such services as might make us known, talked of and regarded. But a child of God, if in the way of duty, and in the place which the Lord's providence has allotted him, is well employed, though he should have no higher service than to sweep the streets, provided he does it humbly, thankfully, and heartily, as to the Lord. An angel so placed could do no more.

This paper will doubtless fall into the hands of some who are not believers, but are spending their days in sin. With a word to such as these, I would conclude. To you this is but a dark subject. You have reason to be alarmed; for, be assured, the whole host of heaven is against you, while they consider you in a state of rebellion against their Lord. They burn with a holy zeal to avenge his cause, and only wait his command to smite you as one of them smote Herod, for not giving glory to God. Pray for faith and repentance. If you believe in Jesus, and turn from your evil ways, the angels will love you, rejoice over you, watch over you, fight for you, and at last convey you into his glorious presence.

I am, &c.

*March 5, 1777.*