

THE
WORKS
OF
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LOMBARD STREET, LONDON.

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

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

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LETTER III.

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MY DEAR FRIEND,

NEXT week I go to London, where I purpose, if nothing unforeseen prevents, to stay a month. Many things, which must necessarily be attended to before my departure, abridge me of that leisure which I could wish to employ in answering your last. However, I will spare you what I can. I thank you for yours. Your objections neither displease nor weary me. While truth is the object of your inquiry, the more freedom you use with me the better. Nor do they surprise me; for I have formerly made the like objections myself. I have stood upon your ground, and I continue to hope you will one day stand upon mine. As I have told you more than once, I do not mean to dictate to you, or wish you to receive anything upon my *ipse dixit* [he said]; but, in the simplicity of friendship, I will give you my thoughts from time to time upon the points you propose, and leave the event to the divine blessing.

I am glad you do not account the Socinians master-builders. However, they esteem themselves so, and are so esteemed, not only by a few, as you think, but by many. I fear Socinianism spreads rapidly amongst us, and bids fair to be the prevailing scheme in this land, especially with those who profess to be the thinking part. The term Arminian, as at present applied, is very indiscriminate, and takes in a great variety of persons and sentiments, amongst whom, I believe, there are many who hold the fundamental truths of the gospel, and live a life of faith in the Son of God. I am far from supposing that God will guide every sincere person exactly to adopt all my sentiments. But there are some sentiments which I believe essential to the very state and character of a true Christian. And these make him a Christian, not merely by being his acknowledged sentiments, but by a certain peculiar manner in which he possesses them. There is a certain important change takes place in the heart, by the operation of the Spirit of God, before the soundest and most orthodox sentiments can have their proper influence upon us. This work, or change, the scriptures describe by various names, each of which is designed to teach us the marvellous effects it produces, and the almighty power by which it is produced. It is sometimes called a new birth, John iii. 3; sometimes a new creature, or a new creation, as 2 Cor. v. 17; sometimes the causing light to shine out of darkness, 2 Cor. iv. 6; sometimes the opening the eyes of the blind, Acts xxvi. 18; sometimes the raising the dead to life, Ephes, ii. 5. Till a person has experienced this change, he will be at a loss to form a right conception of it: but it means, not

being proselyted to an opinion, but receiving a principle of divine life and light in the soul. And till this is received, the things of God, the truths of the gospel cannot be rightly discerned or understood by the utmost powers of fallen man, who, with all his wisdom, reason, and talents, is still but what the apostle calls the natural man, till the power of God visits his heart, 1 Cor. ii. 14. This work is sometimes wrought suddenly, as in the case of Lydia, Acts xvi. 14; at other times very gradually. A person who before was a stranger even to the form of godliness, or, at best, content with a mere form, finds new thoughts arising in his mind, feels some concern about his sins, some desire to please God, some suspicions that all is not right. He examines his views of religion, hopes the best of them, and yet cannot rest satisfied in them. To-day, perhaps, he thinks himself fixed; to-morrow he will be all uncertainty. He inquires of others; weighs, measures, considers, meets with sentiments which he had not attended to, thinks them plausible; but is presently shocked with objections or supposed consequences, which he finds himself unable to remove. As he goes on in his inquiry, his difficulties increase. New doubts arise in his mind; even the scriptures perplex him, and appear to assert contrary things. He would sound the depths of truth by the plummet of his reason; but he finds his line is too short. Yet even now the man is under a guidance, which will at length lead him right. The importance of the subject takes up his thoughts, and takes off the relish he once had for the things of the world. He reads, he prays, he strives, he resolves; sometimes inward embarrassments and outward temptations bring him to his wits end. He almost wishes to stand where he is, and inquire no more; but he cannot stop. At length he begins to feel the inward depravity, which he had before owned as an opinion; a sense of sin and guilt cuts him out new work. Here reasoning will stand him in no stead. This is a painful change of mind; but it prepares the way for a blessing. It silences some objections better than a thousand arguments, it cuts the comb of his own wisdom and attainments, it makes him weary of working for life, and teaches him, in God's due time, the meaning of that text, "To him that worketh not, but believeth in him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Then he learns that scriptural faith is a very different thing from a rational assent to the gospel,—that it is the immediate gift of God (Ephes, ii. 8); the operation of God (Col. ii. 12); that Christ is not only the object, but the author and finisher of faith (Heb. xii. 2); and that faith is not so properly a part of that obedience we owe to God, as an inestimable benefit we receive from him, for Christ's sake (Phil. i. 29), which is the medium of our justification (Rom. v. 1), and the principle by

which we are united to Christ, as the branch to the vine (John xvii. 21). I am well aware of the pains taken to put a different sense upon these and other seemingly mysterious passages of scripture; but thus far we speak that which we know, and testify that which we have seen. I have described a path in which I have known many led, and in which I have walked myself.

The gospel, my dear Sir, is a salvation appointed for those who are ready to perish, and is not designed to put them in a way to save themselves by their own works. It speaks to us as condemned already, and calls upon us to believe in a crucified Saviour, that we may receive redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins. And the Spirit of God, by the gospel, first convinces us of unbelief, sin, and misery; and then, by revealing the things of Jesus to our minds, enables us, as helpless sinners, to come to Christ, to receive him, to behold him, or, in other words, to believe in him, and expect pardon, life, and grace from him; renouncing every hope and aim in which we once rested, and accounting all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, John vi. 35; Is. xlv. 22, with John vi. 40; Col. ii. 6. In some of Omicron's letters you will find my thoughts more at large upon these subjects than I have now time to write them. For a farther illustration, I refer you to the MSS. sent herewith. The first part, written in short hand, does not so immediately concern our present point as the second, which you may read without a key. It relates to a matter of indisputable fact, concerning a person with whom, as you will perceive, I was well acquainted. You may depend upon the truth of every tittle. I entrust it to you in the confidence of friendship, and beg that it may not go out of your hands, and that, when you have perused it, you will return it, sealed up, by a safe conveyance, to my house. You will see in it the sentiments of a man of great learning, sound reasoning, an amiable and irreproachable character, and how little he accounted of all these advantages, when the Lord was pleased to enlighten his mind.

Though we have not exactly the same views of human depravity, yet as we both agree to take our measure of it from the word of God, I trust we shall not always differ about it. Adam was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, Ephes, iv. 24. This moral image, I believe, was totally lost by sin. In that sense he died the day, the moment, he ate the forbidden fruit. God was no longer his joy and delight; he was averse from the thoughts of his presence, and would, if possible, have hid himself from him. His natural powers, though doubtless impaired, were not destroyed. Man, by nature, is still capable of great things. His understanding, reason, memory, imagination, &c. sufficiently proclaim that the hand that made him

is divine. He is, as Milton says of Beelzebub, majestic, though in ruins. He can reason, invent, and, by application, attain a considerable knowledge in natural things. The exertions of human genius, as specified in the characters of some philosophers, poets, orators, &c. are wonderful. But man cannot know, love, trust, or serve his Maker, unless he be renewed in the spirit of his mind. God has preserved in him likewise some feelings of benevolence, pity, some sense of natural justice and truth, &c. without which there could be no society: but these, I apprehend, are little more than instincts, by which the world is kept in some small degree of order; but, being under the direction of pride and self, do not deserve the name of virtue and goodness; because the exercise of them does not spring from a principle of love to God, nor is directed to his glory, or regulated by the rule of his word, till a principle of grace is superadded. You think I will not say, “that God judicially, in punishment of one man’s sin, added these corruptions to all his posterity.” Let us suppose, that the punishment annexed to eating the forbidden fruit had been the loss of Adam’s rational powers, and that he should be degraded to the state and capacity of a brute. In this condition, had he begotten children, after the fall, in his own likeness, his nature being previously changed, they must have been of course brutes like himself; for he could not convey to them those original powers which he had lost. Will this illustrate my meaning? Sin did not deprive him of rationality, but of spirituality. His nature became earthly, sensual, yea devilish; and this fallen nature, this carnal mind, which is enmity against God, which is not subject to his law, neither indeed can be (Rom. viii. 7), we universally derive from him. Look upon children; they presently show themselves averse from good, but exceedingly propense to evil. This they can learn even without a master; but ten thousand instructors and instructions cannot instil good into them, so as to teach them to love their Creator, unless a divine power co-operates. Just as it is with the earth, which produces weeds spontaneously; but if you see a cabbage, or an apple-tree, you are sure it was planted or sown there, and did not spring from the soil. I know many hard questions may be started upon this subject; but the Lord, in due time, will clear his own cause, and vindicate his own ways. I leave all difficulties with him. It is sufficient for me that scripture asserts, and experience proves, that it is thus in fact, Rom. iii. 9–21; Job. xiv. 4. Thus we have not only forfeited our happiness by transgression, but are, by our depravity, incapable of it, and have no more desire or taste for such a state as the scriptures describe heaven to be, than a man born deaf can have for a concert of music. And therefore our Lord declares, that except a man be born again, he not only shall not, but cannot,

see the kingdom of God. Hence a twofold necessity of a Saviour—his blood for the pardon of our sins, and his life, spirit, and grace, to quicken our souls, and form us anew for himself, that we may feel his love, and show forth his praise.

St. Paul, before his conversion, was not sincere, in the sense I hope you to be. He thought himself in the right, without doubt, as many have done when they killed God's servants, John xvi. 2. He was blindly and obstinately zealous. I think he did not enter into the merits of the cause, or inquire into facts with that attention which sincerity would have put him upon. You think that his sincerity and zeal were the very things that made him a chosen instrument; he himself speaks of them as the very things that made him peculiarly unworthy of that honour (1 Cor. xv. 9.); and he tells us, that he was set forth as a pattern of the Lord's long-suffering and mercy, that the very chief of sinners might be encouraged, 1 Tim. i. 15, 16. Had he been sincerely desirous to know whether Jesus was the Messiah, there was enough in his character, doctrines, miracles, and the prophecies concerning him, to have cleared up the point; but he took it for granted he was right in his opinion, and hurried blindly on, and was, as he said himself, exceedingly mad against them. Such a kind of sincerity is common enough. People believe themselves right, and therefore treat others with scorn or rage, appeal to the scriptures, but first lay down their own preconceived sentiments for truths, and then examine what scriptures they can find to countenance them. Surely a person's thinking himself right, will not give a sanction to all that he does under that persuasion.

Ignorance and obstinacy are in themselves sinful, and no plea of sincerity will exempt from the danger of being under their influence, Is. xxvii. 11, Luke vi. 39. It appears to me, that, though you will not follow any man implicitly, you are desirous of discovering your mistakes, supposing you are mistaken in any point of importance. You read and examine the word of God, not to find arms wherewith to defend your sentiments at all events, but to know whether they are defensible or not. You pray for God's light and teaching, and in this search you are willing to risk what men are commonly much afraid of hazarding—character, interest, preferment, favour, &c. A sincerity of this kind I too seldom meet with: when I do, I account it a token for good, and am ready to say, "No man can do this, except God be with him." However, sincerity is not conversion; but I believe it is always a forerunner of it.

I would not be uncharitable and censorious, hasty and peremptory in judging my fellow-creatures. But if I acknowledge the word of God, I

cannot avoid forming my judgment upon it. It is true, I cannot look into people's hearts; but hearts and principles are delineated to my hand in the scriptures. I read, that no murderer has eternal life in him; I read likewise, "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema;" and therefore I conclude, that there are speculative errors, as heinous in their guilt, as destructive in their effects, as murder; and that the most moral, regular man, as to social life, if he loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, is in the sight of God, the judge of all, as displeasing as a murderer. It has pleased God, for the peace and support of society, to put a black mark upon those sins which affect the peace and welfare of our neighbour, such as adultery and murder. But undoubtedly the sins committed immediately against himself must be more heinous than any which offend our fellow-creatures. The second commandment (Matth. xxii. 39.), is like the first; but it depends upon it, and is therefore inferior to it. Men ordinarily judge otherwise. To live regardless of God and the gospel is looked upon as a mere peccadillo in comparison with offences against society. But sooner or later it will appear otherwise to all. A parcel of robbers may pique themselves upon the justice, honour, and truth they observe towards one another; but, because they set up a petty interest, which is inconsistent with the public good, they are deservedly accounted villains, and treated as such, notwithstanding their petty morality among themselves. Now such a company of robbers bears a much greater proportion to a whole nation, than a nation, or all the nations of the earth, bears to the great God. Our dependence upon him is absolute, our obligations to him infinite. In vain shall men plead their moral discharge of relative duties to each other, if they fail in the unspeakably greater relation under which they stand to God; and therefore, when I see people living without God in the world, as all do till they are converted, I cannot but judge them in a dangerous state;—not because I take pleasure in censuring, or think myself authorised to pass sentence upon my fellow-creatures, but because the scriptures decide expressly on the case, and I am bound to take my sentiments from thence.

The jailor was certainly a Christian when baptised, as you observe. He trembled; he cried out, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did not bid him amend his life, but believe in the Lord Jesus. He believed and rejoiced. But the Lord blessed the apostle's words, to produce in him that saving faith which filled him with joy and peace. It was, as I observed before, something more than an assent to the proposition, that Jesus is the Christ; a resting in him for forgiveness and acceptance, and a cleaving to him in love. No other faith will purify the heart, work by love, and overcome the world.

I need not have pleaded want of leisure as an excuse for a short letter, for I have written a long one. I feel myself much interested in your concerns; and your unexpected frank application to me (though you well know the light in which I appear to some people) I consider as a providential call, which binds me to your service. I hope our correspondence will be productive of happy effects, and that we shall both one day rejoice in it.

I am, &c.