

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.

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MESSIAH

OR
FIFTY EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES

ON THE SERIES OF

SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES

WHICH FORM THE SUBJECT OF HANDEL'S CELEBRATED

ORATORIO

OF THAT NAME,

PREACHED IN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1785,

IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,

LOMBARD STREET,

LONDON.

—————Ah!

Tantamne rem, tam negligenter, agere ! TER.

Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this!—DEUT. xxxii. 29.

TO THE
PARISHIONERS OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH,
AND
ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH HAW,
LONDON,
THESE SERMONS
ON THE
MESSIAH
ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY THE
AUTHOR,
TO REMAIN AS A TESTIMONY OF HIS RESPECT
FOR THEIR PERSONS,
AND HIS SOLICITUDE FOR THEIR WELFARE,
WHEN HIS PRESENT RELATION
TO THEM, AS THEIR MINISTER,
SHALL BE DISSOLVED.

SERMON XVIII.

VOLUNTARY SUFFERING.

*I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair;
I hid not my face from shame and spitting. ISAIAH, 1. 6.*

THAT which often passes amongst men for resolution, and the proof of a noble, courageous spirit, is, in reality, the effect and mark of a weak and little mind. At least, it is chiefly owing to the presence of certain circumstances, which have a greater influence upon the conduct than any inherent principle. Thus, many persons who appear to set death and danger at defiance in the hour of battle, while they are animated by the examples of those around them, and instigated by a fear of the punishment or shame they would incur if they deserted their post; upon a change of situation, as, for instance, on a bed of sickness, discover no traces of the heroism for which they were before applauded, but tremble at the leisurely approach of death, though they were thought to despise it under a different form. It was not true fortitude, it was rather a contemptible pusillanimity, that determined the celebrated Cato to destroy himself. He was afraid of Cæsar; his dread of him, after his victories, was so great, that he durst not look him in the face; and therefore he killed himself to avoid him. To the same meanness of sentiment we may confidently ascribe the pretended gallantry of modern duellists. They fight, not because they are not afraid of death, but because they are impelled by another fear, which makes a greater impression upon a feeble, irresolute mind. They live upon the opinion of their fellow-creatures, and feel themselves too weak to bear the contempt they should meet with from the circle of their acquaintance, if they should decline acting upon the false principles of honour which pride and folly have established. They have not resolution sufficient to act the part which conscience and reason would dictate, and therefore hazard life, and everything that is dear to them as men, rather than dare to withstand the prevalence of an absurd and brutal custom.

A patient enduring of affliction, and especially of disgrace and contempt, to which the characters the world most admire are confessedly unequal, is a much surer proof of true fortitude, than any of those actions which the love of praise, the fear of man, or even a mercenary attachment to lucre, are capable of producing. True magnanimity is evidenced by the real importance of the end it proposes, and by the steadiness with which it pursues the proper means of attaining that end; undisturbed and unwearied by difficulty, danger, or pain, and equally indifferent to the censure or scorn of incompetent judges. This greatness of mind is essential and peculiar to the character of the Christian, I mean the Christian who deserves the name. His ends are great and sublime, to

glorify God, to obtain nearer communion with him, and to advance in conformity to his holy will. To attain these ends, he employs the means prescribed by the Lord, he waits at Wisdom's gates (Prov. viii. 34), and walks in the paths of dependence and obedience. He therefore cannot conform to the prevailing maxims and pursuits of the many, and is liable to be hated and scorned for his singularity. But he neither courts the smiles of men, nor shrinks at the thought of their displeasure. He loves his fellow-creatures, and is ready to do them every kind office in his power; but he cannot fear them, because he fears the Lord God.

But this life the Christian lives by faith in the Son of God, Gal. ii. 20. Jesus is the source of his wisdom and strength. He likewise is his exemplar. He is crucified to the world by the cross of Christ; and a principal reason of his indifference to the opinion of the world, is the consideration of the manner in which his Lord was treated by it. He is the follower of him who said, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: hid not my face from shame and spitting."

We may observe, from the words, that the humiliation of Messiah was *voluntary*, and that it was *extreme*.

I. With respect to his engagement, as the Mediator between God and sinners, a great work was given him to do, and he became responsible; and therefore, in this sense, bound, and under obligation. But his compliance was likewise voluntary; for he gave himself up freely to suffer, the just for the unjust. Could he have relinquished our cause, and left us to the deserved consequence of our sins, in the trying hour when his enemies seized upon him, legions of angels (Matth. xxvi. 53), had they been wanted, would have appeared for his rescue. But if he was determined to save others, then his own sufferings were unavoidable. Men, in the prosecution of their designs, often meet with unexpected difficulties in their way, which, though they encounter with some cheerfulness, in hope of surmounting them, and carrying their point at last, are considered as impediments; but the sufferings of Messiah were essentially necessary to the accomplishment of his great designs, precisely determined, and present to his view beforehand, so that (as I lately observed) there was not a single circumstance that happened to him unawares. He knew that no blood but his own could make atonement for sin, that nothing less than his humiliation could expiate our pride; that if he did not thus suffer, sinners must inevitably perish; and therefore (such was his love!) he cheerfully and voluntarily gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. Two designs of vast importance filled his mind; the completion of them was that joy set before him, for the sake of which he made himself of no reputation, endured the cross, and despised the shame. These were, the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners.

1. The highest end of his mediation was to display the glory of the divine

character in the strongest light, to afford to all intelligent creatures (Eph. iii. 10), the brightest manifestation they are capable of receiving, of the manifold wisdom of God, his holiness, justice, truth, and love, the stability and excellence of his moral government, all mutually illustrating each other, as combined and shining forth in his person, and in his mediatorial work. Much of the glory of God may be seen, by an enlightened eye, in creation, much in his providential rule and care over his creatures; but the brightness of his glory (John i. 18), the express and full discovery of his perfections, can only be known by Jesus Christ, and the revelation which God has given of himself to the world by him. And, accordingly, we are assured, that the angels, whose knowledge of the natural world is doubtless vastly superior to ours, desire to look into these things; and that the manifold wisdom of God is supereminently made known to principalities and powers, in heaven, by the dispensation of his grace to the church redeemed from the earth.

2. Subordinate to this great design, closely connected with it, and the principal effect for which it will be admired and magnified to eternity, is the complete and everlasting salvation of that multitude of miserable sinners, who, according to the purpose of God, and by the working of his mighty power, shall believe in this Saviour; and who, renouncing every other hope, shall put their trust in him, upon the warrant of the promise and command of God, and yield themselves to be his willing and devoted people. Many are their tribulations in the present life, but they shall be delivered out of them all; they shall overcome, they shall be more than conquerors, by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of his testimony (Rev. xii. 11); and then they shall shine, like the sun, in the kingdom of heaven. The consummation of their happiness, is a branch of the joy which was set before him. For their sakes, that they might be happy, that he may be admired in them, and by them, to the glory of God, who is all in all, he voluntarily substituted himself to sufferings and death. He endured the cross, and he despised the shame. He gave his back to the smiters, his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, he hid not his face from shame and spitting.

II. But are we reading a prophecy, or the history of his extreme humiliation? It is a prophecy; how literally and exactly it was fulfilled, we learn from his history by the evangelists. With what cruelty, with what contempt was he treated, first by the servants in the hall of the High Priest, afterwards by the Roman soldiers! Let us consider him, who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, Heb. xii. 3. These words of the apostle suggest some preliminary observations, to prepare our minds for receiving a due impression from the several particulars here mentioned.

When the apostle would dispose believers by an argument or motive (which, if we fully understood it, would render all other arguments unnecessary) to endure sufferings and crosses patiently, he says "Consider

him”—he uses a word which is properly a mathematical term, denoting the ratio or proportion, between different numbers or figures; *q.d.* “Compare yourselves with him, and his sufferings with your own. Consider who he is, no less than what he endured.”

In the apprehensions of men, insults are aggravated in proportion to the disparity between the person who receives, and who offers them. A blow from an equal is an offence, but would be still more deeply resented from an inferior. But if a subject, a servant, a slave, should presume to strike a king, it would justly be deemed an enormous crime. But Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, whom all the angels of God worship, made himself so entirely of no reputation, that the basest of the people, the servants, the common soldiers, were not afraid to make him the object of their derision, and to express their hatred in the most sarcastic and contemptuous manner. It is said, that he endured the contradiction of sinners. So, perhaps, do we; but we are sinners likewise, and deserve much more than we suffer, if not immediately from the instruments of our grief, yet from the Lord, who has a right to employ what instruments he pleases to afflict us for our sins. This thought quieted the spirit of David, when his own son rose up against his life, and his own servant cursed him to his face, 2 Sam. xvi. 11. But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled, he had done nothing amiss; yet the usage he met with was such as has seldom been offered to the vilest malefactor. Their cruel and scornful contradiction was likewise expressly and directly against himself; whereas his people only suffer from unreasonable and wicked men, for his sake, and for their professed attachment to him. In the most violent persecutions, they who could be prevailed on to renounce his name and his cause usually escaped punishment, and were frequently favoured and rewarded. And this is still the ground of the world’s displeasure; fierce and bitter as their opposition may seem, the way to reconciliation is always open; they are not angry with us farther than we avow a dependence upon him, and show ourselves determined to obey him rather than men. If we could forsake him, their resentment would be disarmed, for they mean no more than to intimidate us from his service. I do not think that they who make peace with the world upon these terms, are esteemed by them for their compliance, but they are seldom disturbed any longer. It is plain, therefore, that if we suffer as Christians, it is for his sake. He likewise suffered for our sakes; but how wide is the difference between him and us? We, when the trial is sharp, are in danger of flinching from the cause of our best Friend and benefactor, to whom our obligations are so innumerable, and so immense; whereas he gave himself up to endure such things for us, when we were strangers and enemies! He was not only treated with cruelty, but with every mark of the utmost detestation and scorn, which wanton, unfeeling, unrestrained barbarity could suggest.

1. They began to spit upon him in the High Priest’s hall. The Roman

soldiers likewise did spit upon him, when they had contemptuously arrayed him in a scarlet robe, and bowed the knee before him, in mockery of his title of King. Great as an insult of this kind would be deemed amongst us, it was considered as still greater, according to the customs prevalent in eastern countries. There, to spit, even in the presence of a person, though it were only upon the ground, conveyed the idea of disdain and abhorrence. But the lowest of the people spit in the face of the Son of God. No comparison can fully illustrate this indignity. There is some proportion between the greatest earthly monarch and the most abject slave. They did not spit upon Alexander, or Caesar, but upon the Lord of glory

2. They buffeted and beat him on the face, and when he meekly offered his cheek to their blows, they plucked off the hair. The beard was in those times accounted honourable: and when David's servants were shaved by the command of Hanun (2 Sam. x. 5), they were ashamed to be seen. But Jesus was not shaven. With savage violence they tore off the hair of his beard; while he, like a sheep before the shearers, was dumb, and quietly yielded himself to their outrages.

3. His back they tore with scourges, as was foretold by the psalmist: "The plowers plowed upon my back, they made long their furrows," Psal. cxxix. 3. The Jewish council condemned him to death for blasphemy, because he said he was the son of God. Stoning was the punishment prescribed by the law of Moses, in such cases, Lev. xiv. 16. But this death was not sufficiently lingering and tormenting to gratify their malice. To glut their insatiable cruelty, they were therefore willing to own their subjection to the Roman power to be so absolute, that it was not lawful for them to put any one to death (John xvii. 31), according to their own judicial law; and thus wilfully, though unwittingly, they fulfilled the prophecies. They preferred the punishment which the Romans appropriated to slaves who were guilty of flagitious crimes, and therefore insisted that he should be crucified. According to the Roman custom, those who were crucified were previously scourged. Thus, when they had mocked him, and made him their sport, by putting a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed in his hand for a sceptre, in derision of his kingly office, he was stripped and scourged. It was not unfrequent for the sufferers to expire under the severity and torture of scourging. And we may be certain that Jesus experienced no lenity from their merciless hands. The plowers plowed his back. But more and greater tortures were before him. He was engaged to make a full atonement for sin by his sufferings; and as he had power over his own life, he would not dismiss his spirit, till he could say, "It is finished."

And now, to use the words of Pilate, "Behold the man!" John xix. 5. Oh! for a realizing impression of this his extreme humiliation and suffering, that we may be duly affected with a sense of his love to sinners, and of the evil of our sins, which rendered it necessary that the surety should thus suffer! Behold

the Lamb of God, mocked, blindfolded, spit upon, and scourged! Let us add to all this the consideration of his praying for his tormentors (Luke xxiii. 34), and we have an example of perfect magnanimity.

Shall we then refuse to suffer shame for his sake, and be intimidated by the frowns or contempt of men, from avowing our attachment to him! Ah! Lord, we are, indeed, capable of this baseness and ingratitude. But if thou art pleased to strengthen us with the power of thy Spirit, we will account such disgrace our glory. Then we will not hang down our heads and despond, but will rather rejoice and be exceeding glad, if the world revile us, and persecute us, and speak all manner of evil against us, provided it be falsely (Matth. v. 11), and provided it be for thy sake!

Shall we continue in sin (Rom. vi. 1.) after we know what it cost him to expiate our sins? God forbid! When Mark Antony addressed the citizens of Rome, to animate them to revenge the death of Caesar, he enlarged upon Cæsar's character, his great actions, his love to the Roman people, and the evidence he had given of it, in the donations and bequests he had appointed them by his will, the particulars of which he specified. When he had thus engaged their admiration and gratitude, and they discovered emotions of regret and sensibility, that Caesar, the greatest character in Rome, who had fought and triumphed for them, and had remembered them in his will, should be slain, Antony threw aside a cloth, and showed them his dead body covered with wounds and blood. This sight rendered it needless to say more. The whole assembly united as one man, to search out, and to destroy his murderers. The application is obvious.—May our hearts, from this hour, be filled with a determined, invariable resentment against sin, the procuring cause of the humiliation and death of our best Friend and benefactor!