PART THIRD.

Observations on the Preceding Narrative.

MY design in writing this account of myself, and my religious inquiries and change of sentiments, was this: I considered myself as a singular instance of a very unlikely person, in an uncommon manner, being led on from one thing to another, to embrace a system of doctrine which he once heartily de­spised. As I assuredly believe that this change hath been effected under the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit, so I hoped that a circumstantial re­lation of it might be an encouragement and comfort to those who know and love the Lord, and from them levy a tribute of gratitude and praise to our gracious God: and that it also might be instrumental, by the convincing Spirit, to awaken others to a serious review of their religious sentiments; to put them upon the same earnest inquiry after the truth as it is in Jesus; and to influence them to the diligent use of the same blessed means, in which the Lord directed me to be found. I would therefore now offer a few observa­tions on the preceding Narrative: and may the Lord guide both the writer, and every reader of these pages, to the saving knowledge of the truth, and into the ways of peace and righteousness.

I. It must be evident to every *unprejudiced* reader of this Narrative, that at the time this change commenced, I was, humanly speaking, a most un­likely person to embrace the system of doctrine above stated.—This will ap­pear from the following considerations:—

I. My religious opinions had been for many years directly contrary to it. Being always of a reflecting turn of mind, I entertained exceedingly high notions of the power of human reason; and I had, upon *reasoning principles,* embraced a system of religion, which both soothed my conscience and flat­tered my self-conceit. After some trivial alterations, I seemed to myself, upon mature deliberation, to have come to a settled determination, and had bestowed considerable pains in making myself acquainted with those argu­ments and interpretations of Scripture, by which that system is usually de­fended: and I had ranked together many of those plausible objections and high charges, which are commonly brought by reasoning men against the doctrines and characters of the *Calvinists.* But I was in a great measure a stranger to what the *Calvinists* could say for themselves; because I thought the matter too plain to bear an argument, and therefore did not think their answers worth reading. In short, very few have been recovered from that abyss of error, (for so I must call it,) into which I had been permitted to sink. Full of confidence in my cause, and in the arguments with which I was prepared to support it, I was eager to engage in controversy with the *Calvinists,* and entertained the most sanguine hopes of victory. In this con­fidence I frequently harangued against them from the pulpit, and spared not to charge upon them consequences both absurd and shocking. Yet, af­ter much, very much, anxious diligent inquiry, I have embraced, as the sa­cred truths of God’s unerring word, every doctrine of this despised system!

2. My natural spirit and temper were very unfavourable to such a change. Few persons have ever been more self-sufficient and positive in their opinions, than I was. Fond to excess of entering into argument, I never failed on these occasions to betray this peculiarity of my character. I seldom acknow­ledged or suspected myself mistaken; and scarcely ever dropped an argument, till either my reasonings or obstinacy had silenced my opponent. A certain person once said of me, that I was like a stone rolling down a hill, which could neither be stopped nor turned: this witness was true; but those things which are impossible with man, are easy with God. I am evidently both stopped and turned: man, I am persuaded, could not have done it; but this hath God wrought, and I am not more a wonder to others than to my­self. Indeed, I carried the same obstinate positive temper into my religious inquiries; for I never gave up one tittle of my sentiments till I could de­fend it no longer; nor ever submitted to conviction till I could no longer re­sist. The strong man armed with my natural pride and obstinacy, with my vain imaginations and reasonings, and high thoughts, had built himself many strong-holds, and kept his castle in my heart; and, when One stronger than he came against him, he stood a long siege: till, being by superior force driven from one to another, and all his armour in which he trusted being at length taken from him, he was constrained to recede. So that the Lord hav­ing made me willing in the day of his power, I was forced to confess, “O Lord, thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed.”

3. My situation in life rendered such a change improbable. I had an in­creasing family, no private fortune, a narrow precarious income, and no ex­pectations, except from such friends as my conduct might procure or con­tinue to me. I had unexpectedly contracted an acquaintance with some of those, whose favour goes a great way towards a man’s advancement in life; nor was I insensible to the advantages to be hoped for, from cultivating by a compliant behaviour their kind and friendly regard to me. At the same time, I was no stranger to the opinion which the world entertain of those who preach these disreputable doctrines; and could not but conclude, that embracing them would probably deprive me of these prospects of prefer­ment. But, as the result of diligent inquiry, I was assuredly convinced that it was my indispensable duty to profess and preach them, and that by so doing alone, I could ensure to myself the favour of a better Friend than any here below: and thus, while fully aware all along how unfavourable, *accor­ding to human probability,* it would prove to my worldly interests, I at length deliberately embraced them.

4. My regard to character was no trifling security against such a change of sentiment. I was ambitiously and excessively fond of that honour which cometh from man; and considered the desire of praise as allowable, nay, laud­able. By this motive was I urged on to a very diligent prosecution of my studies, even beyond what natural inclination led me to; and my whole conduct was influenced by, my whole conversation was tinctured with, this vain-glorious aim. On the other hand, with approbation and self-compla­cency, I had been accustomed to bear the most contemptuous and opprobri­ous epithets liberally bestowed on those persons, to whom I have now joined myself: and all along, as I verged nearer and nearer to *Methodism,* I was painfully sensible that I was drawing upon myself the same mortifying dis­tinctions. I have been a vain-glorious candidate for human applause: but I renounce such pretensions, and willingly submit to be considered by the world, under the mortifying character of a half-witted, crack-brained enthu­siast. These epithets I am sensible are now bestowed upon me behind my back, nay, very often to my face: I bless God, however, this doth not move me; but I can heartily thank him, that I am counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake. But when I saw the trial approaching, it appeared very for­midable; and I can truly affirm, that nothing but the fullest conviction, that the cause in which I was embarking was the cause of God, nothing, but not daring to act contrary to the plain dictates of my conscience, could have in­fluenced me to make this sacrifice of my character, and bring upon myself so much scorn and contempt.

5. To reason with our despisers upon their own principles: if I am now fallen into enthusiasm, mistake, and strong delusion; I certainly was, when I first set out in this inquiry, a very unlikely person so to do. My leading resolve was to search for the truth diligently, and to embrace it wherever I found it, and whatever it might cost. No sooner had I begun the inquiry, than I was called upon to give proof of the sincerity of this resolution; and from a principle of conscience, though a mistaken one, I renounced my pros­pect of an immediate preferment; and it would be uncandid to question my *sincerity* after it had been thus evidenced. Since that time I have also de­liberately sacrificed my character, and hazarded the loss of all my former friends. Giving these proofs of integrity, I set off in dependence on those plain promises which I have mentioned: I have sought this desired know­ledge of the truth, chiefly in reading the Holy Scriptures, and by prayer for the promised teaching of the Holy Ghost, in the manner which hath been related; and I am now led to conclusions diametrically opposite to what I expected! Now, lay all these things together, and attentively consider them, and then let your own consciences determine how far it is probable, that a person, in this manner seeking for the truth, should be given over to a strong delusion to believe a pernicious lie. “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an *egg,* will he give him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Can any man suppose, that after such repeated and continued pleading, of the express promises of the Lord to this effect, in earnest prayer, according to his appointment, I should be delivered up to the teaching of the father of lies? Can anyone make this conclusion with­out an evident insinuation that God hath broken his promises? In short, you may make a jest of the Narrative; you may throw by the book without giving any attention to an argument of this kind; you may say, what you never can prove, that it is all a contrived story; or you may argue, that these promises, though contained in the Bible, are not to be depended on *by us,* which is to give up the Scriptures to be scoffed at by *Infidels* and *Atheists,* and to render them useless to the humble anxious inquirer after truth and salvation; but by no other means, I am assured, can you account for this single circumstance, without allowing, that the substance of those doctrines, which I have now embraced, is indeed contained in the word of God; that they comprise the truth as it is in Jesus, and are not corrupted with any such delusion as can hazard the salvation of my soul, or the souls of those who by my ministry receive them.—On this supposition all difficulties vanish. The Lord had given me a sincere desire to know the saving doctrine of the gos­pel; and though I was exceedingly ignorant, obstinate, and prejudiced, yet this desire having, according to his direction, led me to the word of God, and influenced me to seek his teaching by prayer, he was faithful to his own pro­mises, and it was an example of his own words, “Every one that asketh re­ceiveth, and he that seeketh findeth.” My evident sincerity in seeking the truth was sufficient to convince any person, conversant and experienced in the things of God, that, as my friend foretold, thither would all my inquiries lead me; in that would they all finally centre. And could I be assured, be­loved reader, whoever thou art, that thou wast as sincerely desirous to know the truth as I then was, and as heartily resolved to embrace it wherever thou mightest find it, and whatever it should cost thee; had I also assurance that, in a believing dependence on these promises, thou wast diligently, and from day to day, in the study of the word of God in prayer, seeking the accom­plishment of them; I would as confidently foretell, that, as to those things which I now regard as essential to salvation, and, if thou hast the souls of others committed to thee, as to what is needful for thy usefulness in the mi­nistry, thou wouldst be brought in time to these same conclusions, whatever thy present religious sentiments may be. May the Lord give thee true sin­cerity, and incline thine heart to try the experiment!

I am aware that many will object to what I have argued on this head, as being too confident; and as what is urged by men of contrary religious sen­timents, each in behalf of his own system: and, as I could not leave any material and plausible objection in force against what I have advanced, I hope the reader will excuse my obviating this beforehand. I would there­fore entreat those who object to the confidence with which this argument is brought forward, *impartially and carefully to consider the limitations with which on every hand it is guarded:* and then to inquire, whether in any other way, than that which hath been mentioned, they can account for the fact. That is, supposing this Narrative true, (for which the appeal is to the heart-searching God,) and supposing the promises mentioned to be proposed to us, that we may embrace them, depend on them, and plead them in prayer, con­sidering the glory of the divine veracity as concerned in their accomplishment to every believer; let them try whether they can possibly evade one of these conclusions:—either God had failed of his promise;—or he hath, in the main, and as far as is expressed, led the author by his Holy Spirit to the knowledge and belief of the truth.—As to the confidence of men of opposite sentiments, I observe, that many who speak in high terms concerning sin­cerity and candour, will, without hesitation condemn, as enthusiastical, such reliance on the promises, and this way of searching for truth; and it is plain they do not seek truth in that manner which they condemn in others. Many others perhaps slightly mention these matters, but they will not en­dure to be closely questioned: for, being conscious that they have not sought the truth in this manner, they evade such discourse as personal. Again, the writings of many professed inquirers after truth evidently show that they ex­pect to find it, not by “trusting in the Lord with all their heart,” or seek­ing it from the Scriptures, and by earnest prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit; but by “leaning to their own understanding;” resting the ar­gument on philosophical reasonings, and the authority of this or that re­nowned name; and supporting their conclusions by bold and perplexing cri­ticisms and interpretations of Scripture. Hence so many daring appeals from revelation to reason and philosophy! hence such and so many objections, brought against doctrines plainly revealed in God’s word, if language hath any determinate meaning! and so many consequences charged upon these doctrines, with a design to invalidate their divine authority; as if the ap­pearance of unreasonableness, imposed by every disingenuous art, were suffi­cient to prove the plainest revelation of God’s Holy Spirit a falsehood! Hence such liberty in interpretation and criticism on the word of God, as the learned would never endure in interpreting or criticising *Virgil* or *Horace!* These things prove that such persons are strangers to that earnest, hearty, sincere desire to *know the truth,* which brings the inquirer to an humble will­ingness to be taught of God, and, in submission of understanding, to seek wisdom from his word and Spirit. It is indeed most evident, that many who profess to be influenced by *this sincere desire to know the truth,* are not trou­bled with suspicions that they are, or can be wrong. They have made up their minds before they begin the inquiry; and you will not find them will­ing to make the least concession, but, in the management of the controversy, resolved to vindicate and contend for every tittle; and where arguments fail, to make use of the other arts of controversy, with which skill in the manage­ment of their weapons, and anger against their opponents, can supply them. Where a cause is thus maintained, you may easily know that there is none of that earnest desire of learning the truth, that anxious fear of mistaking it, that self-diffidence, and those doubts concerning the sentiments held at present, which constitute the godly sincerity that leads the inquirer to the word and Spirit of God for direction and teaching. These things taken to­gether, will, on Scriptural grounds, cut off many confident pretenders to sin­cerity from their claims, as entirely, as they exclude Annas and Caiaphas, and the chief priests, Scribes and Pharisees, from being sincere inquirers into the truth of the Old Testament; when in support of their authority and re­putation, and influenced by pride and anger, they, under colour of their law, put to death Him “of whom Moses and the prophets did write, even Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.” And as to men of another spirit, who appear sincere, humble, and willing to be taught of God in their inquiry after truth, but do not entirely agree with what has been laid down, I would only wish them to observe the distinction established between some and others of these doctrines. Such persons do not, I dare say, materially differ from that which has been mentioned *as necessary to salvation:* as, therefore, I allow them to have been in the main taught of God, so I only require the same allowance. Let it be supposed that the same God, who, according to his promise, hath led both, as far as is needful to salvation, in the same way, has in other things left us to differ, for the mutual exercise of candour and forbearance, till that time when we shall know even as we are known.

II. I would observe, that this change in my sentiments took place very

gradually.

When any person suddenly changes his religious opinions for others very different from them, it is no inconsiderable evidence of a changeable and fickle disposition. It gives cause to suspect that he was not well established in his former sentiments; and that he had taken them upon trust, and was a stranger to the arguments by which they might be defended, and to the objections which might be urged against them. If worldly interest, reputa­tion, or conveniency seem to favour the change, there is room for a presumption, that these had an undue influence upon him: if not, it may be insinu­ated that he was deluded with specious appearances; that he did not allow himself time to weigh the arguments on each side; and that he had only changed one set of notions for another, without having duly considered either of them. Such objections may reasonably be made, and the conse­quences of precipitate changes too often justify them. But though I was always, and still am, of an headlong impetuous spirit in other things, and when once I have purposed, can have no rest from incessant agitation of mind, till I have accomplished my design; yet in this particular I acted in direct opposition to my natural temper. Indeed at first I did in some in­stances too much betray my impetuosity: but at that time I acted not in the character of an inquirer, but in full confidence that I was pleading the cause of truth, and had no more thought of becoming what the world call a *Methodist,* than of turning *Mahometan.* But after that first hurry was over, though commonly in earnest, and sometimes in considerable perturbation of mind, I was outwardly calm and satisfied; being generally enabled to be­lieve that, if I were in anything at present mistaken, I should sometime be guided to the truth. My determination to set about this inquiry proceeded not so much from anxious fears about my own soul, as from a deep sense im­pressed upon my heart of the importance of my ministry, the worth of the souls committed to my charge, and the awful account to be given of them; and as I all along bestowed some pains in instructing my people in what I believed to be the truth, I was preserved from any discomposing fears or undue disquietude of mind. I sat down very coolly to search for the truth; I proceeded very gradually, and with *extreme caution;* I took no one opi­nion upon trust; I gave up none of my sentiments, until the arguments by which I learned to defend them were satisfactorily answered; nor did I ad­mit any new articles into my creed, till either every objection was obviated, or I was pressed on the other hand with such as were still more unanswer­able. Much, very much prayer and meditation preceded every change of sentiment; and I was nearly three years, from the beginning of my inquiry, before I came to a determination what was truth. So long, deliberately, and step by step, I examined the premises, before I finally proceeded to draw my conclusion. I perceive much cause to be ashamed of my unteachable temper: for with such opportunities as were afforded me, if I had improved them, I might have attained to the knowledge and belief of the same truths in much less time. But the Lord, I trust, led me in this way, and left me thus far to my own natural pride of heart; that it might more evidently ap­pear that I received not my doctrines from man, but that indeed, in the first instance, I learned them from the word and Spirit of God.

III. I would observe, that I changed my religious views without any teach­ing from the persons to whose sentiments I have now acceded. For a con­siderable time after the commencement of my inquiries, I would not so much as read what they had to urge in their own behalf. I entered indeed into a correspondence with Mr N.; my intention, however, was not to learn from him, but to dispute with him; and when he waved controversy, I dropt the correspondence, and utterly neglected his letters. From that time I avoided his company, and all the while I declined hearing him preach. I would not be understood to insinuate, that Mr N. has not been useful to me: he has been, and continues to be, eminently so; and I continually see great cause to bless God for giving me such a friend, to be so near at hand on all occasions. But this I assuredly believe, that had I never seen him, at least from the time that his example had put me upon considering my conduct, I should have arrived at the same views of evangelical truth which I now have. His usefulness to me has all along been in those matters in which we were in some measure agreed, not in those in which we differed; for as to these, my proud heart scorned to have him for a teacher.

At the same time, though I had the offer of several books written by *Dis­senters* and *Methodists,* I declined it; and did not, for nearly two years, per­use any of them with sufficient attention to recollect anything of consequence which they contained. I say not this as slighting these books; for justice requires me to acknowledge, that many, which then I ignorantly despised, contain as solid, judicious, and excellent divinity, as hath been penned since the days of the apostles. But I did not get *my system* from them; for that was nearly complete before I was prevailed upon to read them. My studies, besides the Bible, were chiefly confined to authors of allowed reputation in the church of *England,* several of which I have mentioned. When they differed from each other, (as certainly *Tillotson* and *Hooker, Jortin* and *Beveridge, Bull* and *Hall* do differ very much indeed,) I endeavoured to judge for myself, com­paring all of them with the word of God, and with the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the Church of *England;* and from such authors thus compared, as far as the writings of uninspired men have been instrumental to this change, I have received the greatest part of my present opinions.

But let it be observed, that the further these streams are traced upward towards the fountain of the blessed reformation, the purer they flow, accor­ding to my present judgment: and it may easily and undeniably be proved, that there is nothing material preached by many regular clergymen of the establishment, under the scandal of *Methodistical,* which was not expressly taught by those excellent persons, who, having laid the foundation of our church, gave their bodies to be burned in confirmation of their doctrine. It is greatly to be wished, that their lives and discourses, living and dying, and their remaining writings, were more generally known among us, and did not remain locked up from the world in large folios in the learned languages, and in books out of print, or exceedingly scarce. In consequence of this, the members of our national church are in general utterly ignorant of its standard-doctrines, and ignorantly brand those as *Methodists* and *Enthusiasts,* who preach zealously the very doctrines of the first Reformers.

IV. I would observe the great influence which the study of the Scriptures had in producing this change.

We are all too apt, without careful examination, to take things for granted, especially in respect of religion. We often collect our scheme of divinity from other authors, or from our own reasonings and imaginations; and only seek for a few detached texts which appear to countenance our preconceived opinions; neglecting, or very slightly considering such parts of the word of God as seem incapable of being made use of to our purpose. We are like­wise too prone, in availing ourselves of the labours of critics and expositors, to resign up ourselves implicitly to their guidance, and to imagine that we have proof enough of our doctrines, if we can produce the sanction of some great name that has espoused and maintained them, without carefully exa­mining whether they be right or wrong: but this is to pay that deference to the human interpretation, which is only due to the divine book commented on. We, ministers especially, though at ordination we solemnly promise to turn all our studies, as much as may be, into this channel, are very apt to suffer our time and thoughts to be engrossed with such studies and employ­ments, as are foreign to our profession, and interfere with it, and which leave at most but a secondary attention for the study of the word of God. And who can deny, that many do not bestow so much pains in meditating upon the Bible, and in comparing spiritual things with spiritual; or one part of Scripture with another, and every part with what they experience in their own hearts, and what they hear and see in the world around them, as they do about matters of far less consequence? So that probably, should they at any time sit down to diligent examination of the whole word of God, they would find it a very different book than they expected. Thus at least it has been with me, and possibly it may be so with many others.

The word of God informs us that true wisdom, the saving, practical, and experimental knowledge of divine things, is not to be acquired without ear­nest and diligent seeking: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wis­dom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after know­ledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding: if thou seekest her as sil­ver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” Prov. ii. 1-6. If then our wisdom has been acquired without any of that eagerness and pain­ful diligence with which the covetous man desires and seeks for his riches, it is a shrewd conjecture, that it is not of the genuine sort. Once I had in my own esteem a sort of wisdom, which seemed to offer itself to me sponta­neously, and to be found with little seeking. But now I am persuaded it was a mere counterfeit, a fair-seeming pernicious foolishness.

That which I now esteem to be true wisdom, if I could but attain to it, is not to be acquired in so easy a manner. When I first began to desire and seek this wisdom, I set out with the assurance that it was to be found in the Holy Scriptures, and nowhere else; they alone being able to make us wise unto salvation. I therefore consider myself engaged to make them my study: and as the whole was “given by inspiration from God,” and was all declared to be profitable, according to the various ends which the Holy Spirit designed in it, I made the whole my study. Thus I learned to look upon the Bible as my book of instructions, given me along with the ministerial office by my Lord and Master; that from thence I might deduce all my doctrines, in­structions, and admonitions, warnings, examples, encouragements, rules of duty, and motives to duty: and I also considered it to be the believer’s char­ter of privileges, containing exceedingly great and precious promises, and the whole of that which God saw fit to reveal concerning those unspeakable and inconceivable good things which he hath of his infinite mercy prepared for them that love him. In order therefore faithfully to declare my message from the Lord Almighty to the souls of men, I found it indispensably need­ful to be well acquainted with every part, and to take the word of God my­self, as well as propose it to others, as “the lantern of my feet, and the light of my paths:” not only attending to the *letter,* but also to the *true meaning,* the mind of the Spirit of God in it. This I found to be a work that required much time, great diligence, mature consideration, and an unbiased, unpre­judiced mind.

With this view of the matter partly obtained, and continually more and more unfolding itself, I studied the word of God; and having now for nearly four years thus employed a very considerable part of my time, neither re­jecting, nor yet greatly depending on the assistance of interpreters. I sin­cerely desired to know the truth, and for that end I read the Scriptures, “not as the word of man, but as the word of God.” And though there have been seasons of remissness, when other employments and studies too much interfered with this main business; and though at first I was very far from an unbiased mind, being blindly and obstinately prejudiced against those doctrines which I now believe to be the true gospel of Jesus Christ; yet in that space, I have read the Bible many times over, in every part with the strictest attention of which I have been capable. There are very few pas­sages which relate to doctrine, that I have not repeatedly and diligently ex­amined, comparing one with another, with all the care and consideration I could; and I seldom ever ceased meditating on any portion of Scripture, un­til I had attained to some satisfying conclusion concerning its true meaning, and its agreement with other Scriptures. I may truly say, I have filled *reams of paper* with religious discussions, with sermons, expositions and letters; in all which I ransacked the Bible to bring as much Scriptural evi­dence for my direction as possible. For these last two years I have scarcely opened a book except upon religious subjects, and from morning till night, nearly every day, all this while, my thoughts incessantly have been employed in meditation upon the great truths of the gospel. Every difficulty and ob­jection, (and difficulties and objections, both from my own meditations and in the course of my reading, continually crowded upon my mind,) sent me to the word of God, and increased my care and attention in examining and weighing every text of Scripture, respecting the point in question, before I exchanged my old opinion for a new one.

Thus, I may truly say, I have sought in the word of God, (that field in which alone this precious treasure lies hid,) “for wisdom,” *for the saving knowledge of divine things,* “as for silver, and searched for her as for hid trea­sure.” And though I am sensible that my knowledge is still comparatively superficial, the knowledge of a child, of a novice in the school of Christ; yet, I trust that, as far as relates to the leading truths of the gospel, according to the promise, I am brought “to understand the fear of the Lord, and have found the knowledge of God.”

Permit me now, beloved reader, to put thee in remembrance, that until thou hast, with some good measure of this diligence, studied the whole word of God, thou runnest very great hazards in passing judgment upon men and doctrines. Be cautious what thou doest; let these men quite alone, until thou hast imitated the conduct of the noble *Bereans,* and thoroughly, and with unbiased mind, examined and meditated upon the whole word of God, to see whether the things they believe and teach be so or not: lest otherwise it should come to pass, (as probably it will,) that, in opposing and condemn­ing them, thou shouldst be found to fight against God. Oh! that the Lord would hear and grant my request, and by his Holy Spirit powerfully incline the hearts of all who read these sheets, according to their leisure, station in life, obligations and opportunities, thus attentively to read their Bibles; not as the word of man, but as the word of God himself, speaking from heaven unto them, and concerning the everlasting interests of their precious and immortal souls! Be the adviser what he will, despised and deserving to be despised, the advice is undoubtedly good:—advice he will have no occasion to repent having thus given, at the solemn hour of death, and the awful day of judgment; advice which, at those approaching seasons, none will repent having followed, though it should divert them from more amusing, and at this day, more reputable studies; or engross that time which they have been accustomed to devote to more pleasurable and fashionable employments; but which, neglected, will be an additional sting in every conscience through all the countless ages of eternity.

And, Oh! that they to whom the chief Shepherd hath committed the care of precious souls, and at whose hands he will assuredly require every one that perishes through their default, would take in good part this expression of the very affectionate desire of my soul, both in behalf of them and of their flocks, in dropping these hints concerning their peculiar obligations, to de­vote much of their time to the attentive unbiased study of the word of God, that infinitely best, but often least studied, of all books! What avails it, that the ministers of the everlasting gospel should be learned classical scho­lars, profound philosophers, metaphysicians and mathematicians, expert lo­gicians, or adorned with the knowledge of the politer sciences, if they are unacquainted, or but superficially acquainted, with the sacred Scriptures? These other branches of literature may amuse and entertain them, may pro­cure them preferment, reputation, respect and favour; but the knowledge of the Bible alone can enable them, in such a manner, to “take heed to themselves, and to their doctrine,” as shall issue in the everlasting salvation of their own souls, and the souls committed to their care. Far be it from me to presume to lay down my opinions as the standard of doctrine, or a rule for the faith and preaching of my brethren in the sacred ministry! but the more obscure I am, the less objection can there reasonably be against my hinting to them, that if anyone should find this subject manifest itself to his conscience, and make him sensible, that verily he hath been faulty in at­tending to other employments, and studying other books more than the word of God; then, possibly, he may be mistaken in his sentiments concerning the doctrines of the gospel, and, being mistaken himself, may be misleading others, to the endangering of their immortal souls: for he cannot be certain but that, should he employ some years in this single study, (which its im­portance well deserves,) he may find the Bible a very different book than he expected.

V. I would observe the influence which *prayer* appears to have had in effecting this change.

I am aware that the world, though called *Christian,* is come to such a pass, that the very mention of this subject in many companies is accounted ill manners, or even received with ridicule; and that being known to maintain a constant communion with God, by prayer and supplication with thanks­giving, is alone sufficient to denominate any person a *Methodist.* It is however most certain, that the word of God is full of precepts, instructions, exhortations, invitations, promises and examples to this effect. He never read his Bible who knows not this; nor can any man, under any pretence whatever, make a jest of this great duty and privilege of a believer, without pour­ing contempt upon the Holy Scriptures, and insulting the brightest charac­ters there proposed to us as examples, not excepting the Lord Jesus him­self. Let men, therefore, under the profession of *Christianity,* be as irreli­gious and profane as they please, I shall not be ashamed to speak upon so unfashionable a topic: for if the word of God be true, he never knew anything as he ought to know, never believed, never repented, never performed one duty aright in his life, who hath not sought all his wisdom, knowledge, faith, repentance, and sufficiency for obedience, from God, by fervent, in­stant, persevering prayer. Time was, even since I had souls committed to my care, that I lived in the neglect of this duty, and so “without God in the world;” but since, through his forbearance and mercy, I have been in earnest about the salvation of my own soul, and the souls of other men; my conduct in this respect has been very different.

“If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” and “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” As he is the Spirit of truth, it is his office to lead us into all truth, and to teach us all things: for he searches and reveals the deep things of God. It is expressly promised to the true church, that “all her children shall be taught of the Lord,” (Isaiah liv. 13.) Referring to this, Christ hath de­clared that “none can come unto him, except he be drawn of the Father,” and “taught of God,” (John vi. 44, 45.) And St Paul declares, that “The *natural man* receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are fool­ishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually dis­cerned.” (I Cor. ii. 14.) The *natural man* [ψυχικος] is explained in Jude, by *not having the Spirit;* which is evidently the Apostle’s meaning in this passage; for in the preceding verse he declares that he preached the gospel, “not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” On these grounds I concluded that man’s natural understanding could not, spiritually or profi­tably, receive the knowledge of revealed mysteries, unless it were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. I learned also, that our eyes may be blinded by Satan, the god and prince of this world; that our understandings may be closed, and a veil be upon our hearts, when we read the word of God; in which case the letter of the Scriptures, without the Spirit, only killeth. Hence the need of the “understanding being opened, to understand the Scriptures;” for want of which the plainest discourses of our Lord to his disciples, concerning his sufferings, death, and resurrection, were hidden from them, and they understood them not.—The veil also must be taken from the heart: for want of which the *Jews,* in reading the *Old Testament,* cannot understand the plainest declarations of *Moses* and the prophets, concerning their promised Saviour.

The Scriptures also everywhere declare, that true wisdom is the gift of God, and must be asked of him, by everyone who would be wise unto sal­vation; that “the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him;” and that those “who receive not the love of the truth, that they may be saved, are given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie; that they might all be damned who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thess. ii. 10-12.)

On these grounds, and depending upon the promises and invitations so plentifully interspersed throughout the Scriptures; when I began to inquire after the truth, I was led also in some measure to cry unto the Lord for his guidance and teaching; and, as my mind grew more engaged, and my diffi­culties, in extricating myself from the labyrinths of controversy, increased, I became more and more earnest, constant, and particular, in making my re­quests known unto God. My constant prayer to the Lord was, to be deli­vered from pride and prejudice, blindness of heart, contempt of the truth, obstinacy, enthusiasm, ignorance, and error; and that the Lord would give me wisdom and knowledge, guide me to the truth as it is in Jesus, open my understanding, take away the veil from my heart, and make known unto me the way of salvation which is revealed to sinners in his holy word. Thus, waiting upon the Lord according to his own appointment, depending on him and pleading his promises from day to day, I was led from one thing to an­other, until my view of religious truth was totally changed. This I most firmly believe to have been by the promised teaching of the Spirit of truth, powerfully enlightening my mind, opening the Scriptures, and, by dispelling the clouds of error and prejudice, enabling me to receive the truth in faith and love. I am conscious that I have no intention, in speaking thus pub­licly on such a subject, but to advance the glory of God in the salvation of souls. But, as in his presence, I must declare that I have prayed over many of the most interesting passages of Scripture, chapter by chapter, and often verse by verse, with the most anxious dread of rejecting or mistaking the truth, or embracing a falsehood; and with the most earnest desire of know­ing what that doctrine was which Jesus and his apostles taught.—In the sight of God, I am sensible I have abundant cause to be humbled and ashamed of my frequent remissness, and the continual defilements of my prayers; but, as surely as I believe his promises to be faithful, as surely as I believe him to be a God that heareth prayer; so surely do I believe, that “flesh and blood hath not revealed” to me the doctrines I now preach, but God himself by his Holy Spirit.

Reader, whoever thou art, if thy conscience testifies that thou hast hitherto lived in the neglect of this important duty, or the formal, lifeless, unmean­ing performance of it with thy lips, while thy heart hath been disengaged, and thy thoughts allowedly wandering to the ends of the earth: if thou hast not been accustomed by fervent prayer to seek wisdom from God by his teach­ing Spirit: if thou knowest not what it is to exercise faith upon the promises pointed out to thee, nor to plead them in prayer to a promise-keeping God: if all thy knowledge of divine things hath been acquired by leaning to thy own understanding: if in reading the Scriptures thou hast looked more to learned critics, commentators, and expositors, than to the illuminating Spirit of God: then be as sure as the word of God is true, and as we are concerned in it, that “the light which is in thee is darkness,” and that thou “know­est nothing yet as thou oughtest to know.”—May the Lord effectually in­cline thine heart to take a contrary course, and to seek wisdom where alone it can be found, even from the Lord, “the Father of lights, and the Giver of every good and perfect gift,” who hath invited and commanded thee to ask, that it may be given thee

VI. I would observe, that there is nothing in this Narrative which can *reasonably* be condemned as *enthusiasm.*

It is allowed that *enthusiasm* properly so called, is a frequent attendant on religious zeal: that in some of its operations it is a grievous evil, and in all attended with many inconveniences; and that it ought very carefully to be guarded against by every religious professor and zealous preacher. It would also be in vain to pretend that the late revivals of religion, which have been indiscriminately stigmatized with the name of *Methodism,* have been, in opinion and practice, entirely free from this enthusiasm. For what re­vivals of religion ever were free from scandals? Where the Lord sows his good seed, there the enemy will be sure to scatter his tares. It must be confessed, that some of the most eminent instruments in this work, whose names, when prejudice shall vanish, will be handed down with honour, as burning and shining lights, to the latest periods of the church, have, by the great­ness of their zeal, through human frailty, been betrayed into sentiments, expressions, and deportment, in some instances, justly to be censured as enthusiastical; of which their enemies have not failed sufficiently to avail themselves.—But whatever indiscretions and mistakes particular persons, who have preached these doctrines, may have fallen into; this doth not, in the judgment of candid and impartial persons, in the least affect the general cause, or prove the doctrines erroneous. We would not contend for the credit of individuals, or the interests of a party, but for the doctrines of God’s word, and of the established Church of *England.* These will continue true and important, though many of those who have zealously and successfully preached them, may have justly incurred the charge of enthusiasm: and I would confidently insist on it, that a man may be led to the belief of the doc­trines, in the way of sober rational inquiry, and zealously preach them, with­out being an enthusiast.

It would be very well, if some of those who so readily accuse whole bodies of apparently religious persons of *enthusiasm,* would favour us with their de­terminate definition of an *enthusiast.* In its original meaning, the word has a very favourable sense, and implies, that, by a *divine* influence upon the soul, a man is filled with an ardour and warmth of zeal in the cause in which he is engaged. Now, “it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;” and if our ardour of soul be from the Spirit of God, according to the revealed will of God, and for the glory of God, it is the noblest, most desirable, most heavenly, and most beneficial exertion of the human mind. In everything but religion, an ardour, described by the term *enthusiasm,* isallowed and commended: a *poetical, a military,* a *patriotic enthusiasm,* even when they carry men beyond the strict bounds of cold reasonings and exact prudence, fail not to meet with admirers. Our zeal may be fervent in everything without censure, unless we be zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of immortal souls. But there is an *enthusiasm* of this sort, which forms the highest elevation, and the noblest effort of the human mind. Such an enthusiasm animated the apostle *Paul* in all his self-denying labours and sufferings, and filled his writings (under the guidance of the Holy Ghost,) with the most ardent zeal for the honour of his dear Saviour, and affection for the souls of men. Such an enthusiasm he expresses, when he says, (2 Cor. v. 13, 14.) “Whether we be beside ourselves it is to God, or whether we be sober, it is for your cause; for the love of Christ constraineth us.” Of this enthusiasm I wish I were far more *guilty.* But on the other hand, there is danger of a counterfeit, pernicious enthusiasm; and about that we are at present inquiring. Now, I apprehend, that in order to constitute this cul­pable enthusiasm, some one or more of the following things must appear. Either, *the ardour of soul excited proceeds from a heated imagination, or from a delusion of Satan, instead of being produced by a divine influence;* or, *the cause on which this ardour is employed is the cause of error and wickedness, instead of the cause of God and truth;* or, *it exerts itself in unjustifiable measures and prac­tices.* For if our ardour be *warranted by the word of God,* if it *do not tend to the dishonour of God, and if it be confined in its exercise to the rules and precepts of the word of God:—how intense soever it may be,* I can see no cause to censure it; unless men can be too zealous for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. But whatever be the distinguishing criterion of enthusiasm, I suppose it will be difficult to fix a charge of it upon anything for which I plead in this Narrative. I never was taught anything by impulses, impressions, visions, dreams or revelations, except so far as the work of the Spirit, in enlightening the understanding for the reception of the truths contained in the Holy Scriptures, is sometimes styled revelation. Other revelation I never expected. Not but that the Lord is sovereign, and may do what he will with his own; and, if he pleases, may, and I suppose sometimes does, go out of the ordinary course, for the conversion of a sinner, or the guidance of a perplexed, or the comfort of a distressed soul; but I never took one step in de­pendence on any such extraordinary interpositions, nor ever encouraged any person to do so. And surely it will not be called *enthusiasm,* by any but avowed infidels, to believe God’s word to be the standard of truth, and his promises to be faithful; and in this belief to seek for the knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel, in the manner above related. In this way I have been taught no new truths; but, as I believe, have been shown the meaning, use, tendency, consistency, harmony, wisdom, and glory of those truths which are contained in the sacred volume; but which before, through pride and ig­norance, I perverted, neglected, reviled, or counted foolishness. Nor do I make any pretences to infallibility: God hath not, I trust, left me so un­stable, as to float about in the uncertain stream of opinion, and to be “tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” As to the grand doctrines of the gospel which I have marked out as *necessary to salvation,* they are nei­ther so uncertain nor so difficult as men would persuade us: their uncer­tainty and difficulty arise wholly from our pride, prejudice, love of sin, and inattentive ignorance of our own hearts. There is really much difficulty in bringing vain man to cease from leaning to his own understanding, and in prevailing with him to trust in the Lord with all his heart, and to be willing, in the humble posture of a little child, to be taught of God. Nothing but a deep conviction of guilt, a fear of wrath, and a sense of our lost condition by nature and practice, can bring our minds into this submissive frame: but, this being effected, the difficulty is over, and the way of salvation is so plain, that the “way-faring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.” As to the other doctrines which I myself believe, though they seem plain enough to me, I desire not to proselyte others to them, but am willing to leave them as matters in which fallible men may differ without danger. And as to my sufficiency for the faithful discharge of my ministry, to God’s glory and the salvation of souls, he will not, I trust, deceive my expectations, which are grounded on his promises. For the rest, I mistake daily, and find myself in continual danger of mixing my own imaginations with his divine truth, and of following my own spirit instead of his. Whatever I preach truly, or do wisely, to God be the glory; for I am not sufficient of myself to think a good thought; whatever I speak falsely, or do foolishly, to me be the shame; for it is the natural fruit of my own deceitful heart. If this be enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm warranted, not only by the word of God, as I have endea­voured to prove, but by the whole liturgy of our Church. We all at ordi­nation profess to be “moved by the Holy Ghost,” to take the ministerial of­fice upon us; and assuredly we cannot be moved by the Holy Ghost, if we neither have the Holy Ghost, nor may expect his help and guidance. We agree to pray that the Lord would lead into the way of truth, all such as have erred and are deceived;” that he would “illuminate all bishops, priests, and deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of his holy word;” that he would “cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit;” that “he would grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit;” with much more to this effect: and I am persuaded, that such a confidence as I have expressed cannot be censured as enthusiasm, without including our Church-establishment and continual public worship in the same charge.

VII*. Lastly,* I would observe that our opposers and despisers will seldom give us the hearing. With all their pretensions to candour, reasoning, and free inquiry, they accuse and condemn us without so much as knowing, with any tolerable degree of accuracy, what our sentiments are, although furnished with such plentiful means of information, in those numerous publications which are now extant upon these subjects.

Having imbibed strong prejudices against us, they frame so contemptible an opinion of our understandings and writings, that they will not bestow so much pains, or afford so much regard, as to peruse our books; and to call an author a *Methodist,* is with many people a sufficient reason why they should not read his works. Hence it comes to pass, that, for want of information, our doctrines are grievously misrepresented; and, in general, the attacks made upon us, though calculated to make our persons odious and despised, do not in the least affect the argument in debate. Our adversaries in gene­ral know little of our opinions, except what they have picked up by *hearsay,* in which neither the connection, consistency, tendency, nor application of those opinions is preserved, no wonder therefore that we are vilified and re­proached with things to which we are utter strangers, or which we abomi­nate and protest against every Lord’s day, and against which we neglect not to fill our writings with reasonings, warnings, and cautions.

For my own part, I freely acknowledge, that my strongest objections against this scheme of doctrine arose wholly from *misapprehension and mistake.* Not having read their books, my notions of the doctrines of the *Methodists* were received from vulgar report, and from their enemies; while my crea­tive imagination put its own construction on them, and drew terrible conse­quences from them: so that when I preached against them, I was as one fighting with my own shadow; and in speaking evil of those things that I knew not, I only betrayed my own ignorance and pride. No better founded are the lamentable outcries which at this day are made against our principles, as if they tended to banish reason, argument, sober-mindedness, and mora­lity out of the world, and in their stead to substitute a set of whimsical va­garies, which are without foundation in reason or Scripture, and have no in­fluence, or rather a pernicious influence, on our conduct and conversation. When such a declamation is ended, (for one would not interrupt it) ask the declaimer what a *Methodist* is?he can scarcely give you an answer: in­quire about the doctrines of the Methodists,—he does not understand them;—or their writings,—he has never read them!

Reader, if thou desirest to know what our opinions are, and what founda­tion there is for these heavy charges, read our books; but read them with attention, and aim at impartiality; compare them with the word of God, and with the liturgy, articles, and homilies of the Church of *England:* and, if thou hast leisure and opportunity, with the works of our first reformers. Nor do we desire thee to renounce thy *reason,* but only to make this *reasonable* concession; that where thy reason is ready to determine one way, but God hath expressly determined another way, thou wouldst allow him to under­stand his own mysteries better than thou dost; and that therefore thou oughtest, by faith exercised upon the veracity of God, to receive, *implicitly and without reasoning,* those doctrines which God hath expressly revealed, and which thy reason feels to be far above its reach, and therefore doubtless out of its province. Whenever, on such inquiry, thou discoverest us to be mis­taken, there dissent from us, yea, blame us, as far as meekness and candour will permit: but do not condemn us in the gross; do not assert our scheme of doctrine to be enthusiastical and groundless, though some of our writers should be found to have advanced questionable opinions. This were the way to drive all truth and certainty out of the world; for what book can be men­tioned, the Bible excepted, in which there is nothing advanced either erro­neous or questionable?

And be assured, that to read only one side of the question, and then cla­morously to adopt every childish cavil, every vague report, every scandalous falsehood, and industriously to propagate them, as if these afforded a suffi­cient confutation of all the arguments, authorities, and scriptural testimo­nies, with which we support our sentiments; is no evidence of a candid libe­ral mind, or of a sincere desire to know the truth. And let it be observed, that though some professors have been proved enthusiasts, and others de­tected to be hypocrites, this doth not prove that we are all enthusiasts and hypocrites. Such rash judgments are most hurtful to those who pass them.

For myself, I here publicly profess, that I will, to the end of my days, ac­knowledge it as the greatest obligation that any person can confer on me, if, in the spirit of meekness, he will point out to me any error or enthusias­tical delusion into which I have fallen, and by sufficient arguments convince me of it, I trust, that my earnest desire to discover “the truth as it is in Jesus,” has not abated in its influence, and that I still retain the same dis­interested resolution to embrace it and adhere to it, with which I set out. Still am I solicitously fearful of being betrayed by a warmth of spirit, and by the deceitfulness of my heart, into erroneous opinions. But clamour and reproach, objections and arguments, brought against sentiments I detest, or consequences I cannot see to be fairly deducible from our doctrines; or such reasonings as set one divine attribute at variance with another, make one part of the Bible contradict another, or exalt the human understanding upon the tribunal, and arraign and condemn revealed mysteries at her presump­tuous bar;—will have no weight at all with me, or with any who ever knew the grace of God in truth.

And now, beloved reader, let me conclude with leaving it upon thy con­science to search for the truth of the gospel in the study of God’s word, ac­companied by prayer, as thou would search for hid treasure. I give thee this counsel, expecting to meet thee at the day of judgment, that our meet­ing may be with joy, and not with grief: may the Lord incline thee to fol­low it with that solemn season full in view! Time how short! eternity how long! life how precarious and vanishing! death how certain! the pursuits and employments of this present life how vain, unsatisfying, trifling, and vexatious! God’s favour and eternal life how unspeakably precious! His wrath, the never-quenched fire, the never-dying worm, how dreadful! Oh! trifle not away the span of life, in heaping up riches which shortly must be left for ever, and which profit not in the day of wrath; in such pleasures and amusements as will issue in eternal torments, or in seeking that glory which shall be swallowed up in everlasting infamy. Agree with me but in this,—that it is good to redeem precious time, to labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, and to attend principally to the one thing needful; take but thy measure *of truth* as well as *duty* from the word of God; be willing to be taught of God; meditate on his word day and night; let it be “the light of thy feet, and the lantern of thy paths;” and in studying it, “lean not to thy own understanding,” trust not implicitly to expositors and commentators, but ask wisdom and teaching of God. Be not a *Felix,* saying to thy serious apprehensions about thy soul, “Go thy way at this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee;” lest death and judgment come before that season:—and be not an *Agrippa,* almost persuaded to be a *Christian;* but seek to be altogether such as the primitive *Christians* were. I say, agree but with me in these reasonable requests, and we shall at length agree in all things;—in many, in this world;—in all, when we hear the Son of God address us in these rejoicing words,—“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” May the Lord vouchsafe unto the writer, and to every reader of this Narra­tive, “that wisdom which is from above;” that teaching of his Holy Spirit, which guides into the ways of peace; that faith which justifies and works by love; that peace of God which passeth understanding; and that measure of sanctifying and strengthening grace, which may enable each of us to be “steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, as knowing that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”