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LETTERS

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TO

A RECENT CONVERT

BY A PASTOR.

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If we only saw the whole, we would see that the Father is doing little  
else in the world but training his vines.—MCHEYNE.  
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Rev. Prof. G. M. Geyer,
Presented by
his Uncle.

G. W. M.

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To my Daughters,

FOR WHOSE USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES WERE

ORIGINALLY, IN PART, DESIGNED,

THIS WORK

Is Affectionately Inscribed

BY

THE AUTHOR.

(v)

ADVERTISEMENT.

DURING a season of religious interest, last year, among the people of his charge, the author found himself unable to devote to converts the attention which they needed, without neglecting another interesting class of persons, whom he was labouring to bring into the fold. That he might give to all, therefore, "a portion in due season," he employed the pen as well as the pulpit. Such was the origin of these letters. Printed at first for private and local circulation, they are now presented to the public, with large additions. The suggestions contained in them are the result of experience, and are thought to have

been found useful. May they prove increasingly useful, and tend to promote the Master's honour, and the edifying of his dear people.

New Brunswick, N. J., Jan. 17, 1853.

J. W. Musgrave

LETTERS

TO

A RECENT CONVERT.



LETTER I.

ON STEDFASTNESS.

Acting from Principle—Cultivation of Conscience—Depending on external Helps—The Feelings—The Heart fixed.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—I am happy to find that you have the spirit of Caleb, and are determined to follow the Lord fully. I hope you will prove a growing Christian; that you will grow wiser, holier, and more useful, every day you live. Although the church of Laodicea has long since become extinct, some of its members appear to be lingering among us still. You may have seen some of them yourself; professors of religion who made no more progress than a door on its hinges; who

were never getting colder or hotter; who were always very much the same; and of whom the most you could say, was, that they did not absolutely retrograde. Contented with doing no harm, neither did they do any good. But in such a lukewarm state it was impossible for them to enjoy religion. They had only enough of it to make them uneasy.

Let your aims and your character be of a very different stamp. I hope you will take a good start, for everything depends on the beginning. You now feel the warmth of a first love; you wonder that you could have been stupid and insensible so long; and you would not give up your present satisfaction, resolutions and hopes, for the world. You may, however, be tempted to remissness, against which it is well to put you on your guard.

You may, for example, become engaged with worldly business or worldly people. You may be sensible of the danger to which it exposes you, without exactly knowing what you should do to prevent it, and to keep yourself from being drawn away by the current

of worldliness against which so much is said by the apostle John. 1 John ii. 15, 16.

Or you may lose in some degree the absorbing interest you lately felt, in consequence of the novelty wearing off, and your becoming familiarized to devotion or duty in a formal sort of way; and you even now feel half alarmed, lest, after all, your emotion should prove but a passing excitement, and you should be in danger of going back to the world.

In either or both of these cases, let me suggest to you the advantage of acting habitually from principle. Frames and feelings will vary, and you are to expect that you will sometimes feel warmer, sometimes not so warm. But if you act from principle, it will give a beautiful consistency and symmetry to your character. Examine whether a thing is right, and then do it because it is right, and not because you happen to feel inclined to do it; and if you know it is right, do it, although you should feel at the moment as if you would rather let it alone. This is acting from principle.

That was an admirable resolution of a certain eminent Christian,* that he would do in his worst frames what he had decided on in his best.

“It is good that the heart be established with grace.” And you are, in Scripture language, “a novice,” “or neophyte,” 1 Tim. iii. 6, i. e. newly planted in the Lord’s vineyard, and not yet firmly established. Indolence and activity you will find to be two conflicting principles of your nature. Victory often hovers uncertain on which standard to perch. Remember that a religious life is truly a conflict, but there is no romance about it. Early learn, then, to adopt a sober, chastened wisdom; and fall into the steady, regular, measured step of a determined traveller to Zion. The Christian life is made up, like every-day life, of a series of little things; and it is the aggregate of these little things that swells them into importance.

Christian people are too apt to be irregular in matters of duty. They omit or abridge

* McCheyne.

their morning and evening devotions; they stay away from religious meetings, or are tardy in their attendance; they permit indifference to creep over them like the green mantle of the slimy pool; they grow more and more conformed to the world in dress and manners; they betray a want of punctuality or exactness in affairs of conscience when the interests of other persons are concerned; they are negligent of their promises, and say too often, before the angel, "it was an error." Eccl. v. 6. Now, you should cultivate your conscience. It should be quick, tender, and sensitive as the apple of the eye, which cannot bear the slightest grain of dust, and rests not till it has wept it out. Your conscience should be exercised, by reason of use, to discriminate between evil and good.

Another too common fault is to depend on external helps. Some persons are continually craving excitement, or at least, they long to feel happy and comfortable. They praise the sermon that warms them up in their pew, or the prayers and the music that

carry off their feelings above the dust of the earth in the chariots of Amminadib, (Sol. Song vi. 12,) and they go away, and say with gusto, "That was a good meeting!" They are taken up with their own comfortable frames, to the utter forgetfulness of active duties. It is a fine thing to be listening to zealous sermons and beautiful hymns, and to abandon one's self to a voluptuous reverie, a spiritual epicurism; but there will be time enough in heaven for enjoyment. Labour, work, activity, is the order of the day now. "Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go ye also into the vineyard." Matt. xx. 6, 7.

It is unhappy when any are disappointed in the gratification or stimulus expected. Either they are tempted to find fault with the dullness of preachers instead of the dullness of their own spirit. They ought to look at home, and examine whether there was any deficiency in the preparation of the heart. Or else they sink down into contented apathy, and lose all interest in religion. In such persons there is a lack of steady principle; there is an excess of impulsiveness; there is too much

that is periodical and spasmodic. We ought never, when duty calls, to ask whether (to borrow a cant, but common phrase,) "we feel like it;" but we should gird up our loins and do it.

That the feelings ought to be enlisted in religion is most true. "It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing." And if religion is not a good thing, what is? Do not understand me, therefore, as discountenancing raised and earnest feeling. Feel as deeply, feel as tenderly, as your heart, penetrated by views of Scripture truth, is capable of feeling; only let principle accompany it. The ebullition of feeling, or animal excitement, is no criterion of grace, unless attended by amendment of the life. If there is religious principle at bottom, it will survive a temporary flutter of the animal spirits; the blossoms may fall, but the fruit will ripen.

The worldly crowd may be fickle and restless as the chaff and the thistledown, which are the sport of every wind; they may resemble the fluctuating sea, vexed and churned by tempests; but for you, let your mind be

made up, let your heart be fixed, Psa. cviii. 1. Set your face like a flint, Isaiah l. 7. Like the sea-girt cliff, round which the tempest and the waves beat in vain, let nothing move you, so that you may finish your course with joy. Acts xx. 24.

LETTER II.

ON WATCHFULNESS.

Motives—Keeping the Heart—Unceasing Vigilance—
Ethelred the Unready—Christian and his Roll—Bo-
som Sins — Little Sins — Only once — Wandering
Thoughts.

MY DEAR FRIEND:— Nearly allied to
Constancy is Watchfulness. The Scriptures
abound in injunctions to be vigilant. They
present a variety of motives, as our liability
to temptation; the incessant assaults of the
arch-adversary of souls; the uncertainty of
the hour of Christ's coming; the danger of
remissness; and the blessedness of being
always ready.

“Keep thy heart,” said the wisest of men,
“with all diligence, for out of it are the
issues of life.” The words are literally,
“with all keeping,” all kinds of keeping, and
at all times. It must be a universal and
unintermitted vigilance. Keep this heart of
yours as a castle, which has its weak points;

which is beleaguered by foes not to be despised; and what is worse, which contains within its walls treacherous inmates. What a task has the commander! He must be at his post night and day; he must set double guards; he must trust to no inspection but that of his own sleepless eye. Keep it as a casket containing a precious jewel. Put it under lock and key. How suspicious would you be, if you detected any one lurking about the vicinity, and coveting the treasure! Keep it as a vineyard. Hedge and wall it in; extirpate every noxious weed, every root of bitterness; water and tend it well; rear the lodge and the tower in the midst; and look that the wild beasts out of the forest devour it not. Keep it as a torch, which is to light you over a difficult route. How tenderly should you shield it from the wind and the rain, that you may not grope in inextricable error! Keep it as a harp, ever in tune; always ready to send forth delicious strains of music, to please the ear of God and man. How mortifying would it be, just at the moment when expectation is awake, to

have to mourn in shame defects which should have been repaired long before !

You should maintain a strict watch over every thought and every wish, and hold the budding propensities in check before they grow to the maturity and strength of passions. A trifling divergence at the opening of the angle will in time extend the poles apart. A fault in a seal or a type may be small, but it perpetuates itself in every fresh impression ; so if every time we think on a particular subject, our thoughts are wrong, the total amount will become formidable.

And this watch must be unceasing, for you cannot pronounce at what hour it will be safe to relax. Babylon paid dearly, by its subjugation, for one night only of revelry and carelessness. Watch well your heart ; guard the citadel of your most precious hopes ; and let neither presumptuous indolence nor carnal security lull you into fatal slumber.

Be not like the easy monarch, styled from his miserable habits, Ethelred the Unready ; but place that illustrious veteran of the cross

in your eye, who could say, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

You remember poor Christian's mishap in the Pilgrim's Progress. After much toil he fell fast asleep in a pleasant harbour, and his roll dropped out of his hand. When he afterwards resumed his journey, he suffered much for want of his roll, and had to retrace many a weary step to recover it. Then he went on, bewailing his sinful indulgence, which led him to sleep in the daytime. And what made his case more trying was, that he was belated in consequence, and exposed to perils from the wild beasts prowling round at night. Take good care of your roll; for you are to give it in at the Celestial gate, as the token and passport of a true pilgrim.

The apostle charges us to be on our guard against the sin that doth so easily beset us. Heb. xii. 1. Every one has his own easily besetting sin. And how many plausible pretensions and flattering hopes

"One cunning bosom-sin blows quite away!"

And how men will plead for this "one cunning bosom-sin!" As Lot pleaded for Zoar,

they say, "Is it not a little one?" They will even redouble the appearance of strictness in other duties, that they may spare this pet sin, this darling of their souls. They cannot bear to give it up. Like the Syrian captain, they want to make a sort of compromise with God, and get him to wink at their bowing in the house of Rimmon.

Or they say, "It is only once;" as if vice does not grow by what it feeds on. Fallacious plea! Who ever stopped with a single indulgence, and did not yearn for more, and yet more? All sin is of an intoxicating nature, and so alters the system, as imperiously to demand fresh stimulus. As St. Augustine truly says, "a bad habit brings on a fatal necessity." Habit grows stronger with each repetition, and becomes at last irresistible; as the equestrian of the circus calls out to lash the horse that is already flying with him round the ring. He cannot, dares not, stop. Beware how you once get into the moral maelstrom! And who ever knew of one sin living by itself, an isolated hermit? No. It must co-exist with company. Sin is grega-

rious. It is not one. Its name is legion. Open the door, ever so little, and a troop rushes in! Gen. xxx. 11.

Strangely enough, the deluded person forgets that one single, solitary sin is enough to sink to ruin, like a single leak in a ship! A thousand may do it more rapidly, but not more effectually. Nip sin in the bud. Set your foot on the young cockatrice in the egg, and crush it before it is hatched into full grown vitality.

Wandering thoughts form another great evil against which you should watch. They torment the pious even at their devotions. They are like a flight of voracious birds, or buzzing flies, lighting on the sacrifice. As soon as you are conscious of the distraction, turn away your thoughts, and endeavour to confine them upon the duty in hand. Vigorous efforts, and vigorous efforts alone, will be successful.

Perhaps this may remind you of the good man who denied that he was troubled with wandering thoughts. "Well," said another, "the next time you go to your devotions, if

you have not a single wandering thought, I'll make you a present of a horse." But when they met again, he frankly owned that he had no right to the horse, for while he was praying, he could not help thinking whether the saddle would go along.

"I compare myself," said John Newton, "to a man upon his knees before the king pleading for his life, or returning thanks for some great favour. In the midst of his speech he sees a butterfly; he immediately breaks off, leaves his speech unfinished, and runs away to catch the butterfly!"

The whole subject is treated at length in Dr. Alexander's "Thoughts on Religious Experience," chap. xii. pp. 179—182. Happy is the man who can truly say with the Psalmist, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise."

LETTER III.

ON REPENTANCE.

Need of Discrimination — Remorse—Fear of punishment—Genuine Repentance—Ezekiel's River—Job—David—Peter—The Prodigal—The Publican—Necessity of Daily Repentance.

MY DEAR FRIEND :—You will find it useful, both for future stability and present satisfaction, to learn to discriminate between what is genuine and what is spurious in religious experience. I propose to drop a few hints which may aid you in this work.

Repentance, as well in the order of nature as of time, seems to occupy the advance-post in the list of spiritual exercises. Whether repentance precedes faith, or faith precedes repentance, (since a man must believe that he is a sinner before he will repent,) or whether this precedence varies in individuals according to their different characters and situations, have been mooted points, which we need not now decide. It is sufficient for us that the

Scriptures represent repentance as the first step, the turning-point, in the process of conversion.

But remorse is not repentance. Keen remorse, such as the dying Randolph felt, may be produced by considerations which are not of a spiritual nature; such as the loss of reputation, the blight of exposure, the pressure of distress, the recollection of mis-spent time, the apprehension of future torment; but if these can be removed, the sorrow will subside, and the heart relapse into its wonted hardness and indifference. A heart-broken mourner is a common sight. But the heart is like a rock of ice, which may be broken into a thousand pieces, yet remain ice still. But to be at once broken and melted beneath the power of the divine word, this is what is needed.

The torments of conscience and the terrors of an endless hell are enough of themselves, upon the least reflection, to harrow up the soul. Any one who allows his thoughts to turn in this direction, may well be seized with alarm; may be filled with hatred of sin, and

may even loathe himself bitterly for his villainess. But suppose some cunning Universalist were to be thrown in your way, who would be able to satisfy you that future judgment and eternal punishment are mere figments, and that you have nothing to fear from a God of boundless love; or if justice requires expiation, that every sinner suffers an adequate penalty in this mortal life;—suppose that you could be imposed upon by such plausible views, would it make any difference in your feelings? Suppose you were convinced there is no hell to punish, and no devil to torment, would your uncomfortable feelings and your sorrow for sin all vanish away? Or do you feel such a hatred of sin and such a sense of its pollution, that, independent of punishment or reward, you would still desire to be rid of sin, and to become pure and holy?

Certainly, although these awful realities remain true, and although fear and hope are legitimate motives to action, you must rise superior to merely selfish considerations. You must not be mercenary or venal. Yours must

not be a religion that consists more in the fear of the devil than in the love of God. You must abhor sin, and repent of it, and forsake it, just as sincerely as if there was no hell to punish or heaven to reward. You must hate sin because it is odious in the sight of God, and all holy beings; because it is hateful in itself, degrading and polluting; and because it was the occasion of the Saviour's sufferings. Until you have such views and feelings, your repentance is inadequate. It stops short of the gospel standard. It is a legal, not an evangelical repentance. It may be remorse, but it is not contrition.

The mystic stream which the prophet was bidden to ford, (Ezek. xlvii. 1—5,) reached at first only up to his ankles, then it was up to his knees, then it rose breast-high, "for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over." Ankle-deep religion will never take us to heaven. Such shallow feelings are of no service. Unless we are brought to our knees, there is no encouraging symptom. But when the tide of deep emotion reaches our hearts, then indeed

do we taste of the spirit of heaven. Then penitence is succeeded by joy, and, like the dying Payson, we swim in a sea of rapture that words cannot express.

Would you see a true penitent who mourns and detests his sins, and feels an honest desire to relinquish them? Behold Job in the bitterness of his soul making confession: "I have sinned; what shall I do to thee, O thou Preserver of men? I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

Behold David, the king of Israel, his palace, his crown, his royal robes, all forsaken and forgotten, pouring out upon his bended knees the compunction of his soul: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me."

And who is that stealing along by the corner of the high priest's palace in the gray of the morning, weeping bitterly? It is Peter, smitten to the heart for his unworthy denial

of his Lord, and melted by that sorrowful, reproving glance.

And yonder see the prodigal returning, and in spite of his rags, his father, who had descried him afar off, runs, and falls on his neck, and kisses him, while in broken words he sobs out, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am not worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants!"

And yet again; observe that humble publican, standing afar off in the temple-court, without resenting the contempt of the lordly Pharisee who elbows him to one side. His streaming eyes are cast down to the ground, and he smites his breast with his hand, as he utters one brief but earnest supplication, "God be merciful unto me a sinner!"

Such is true repentance. "God layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters." Psa. civ. 3. "The foundations of spiritual joy," says Henry, "are laid in the waters of penitential tears. That comfort is likely to last, which follows deep humiliation and contrition of soul for sin."

And this kind of repentance must be practised daily; inasmuch as, in this state of imperfect sanctification, we sin daily. We are not to imagine this duty ends with our conversion. On the contrary, the same model of prayer which teaches us to say, "Give us this day our daily bread," also puts into our mouths the words, "Forgive us our trespasses." So far from thinking that repentance is a duty confined to the unconverted alone, the true Christian, whose conscience is cultivated and sensitive, will most deeply deplore his shortcomings, and humble himself continually before God. In Henry Martyn's diary you will find an entry to this effect—"This day I had a sweet season of bitter repentance."

LETTER IV.

ON FAITH.

Faith the root-grace—Simple—no Mystery—Trustful
Disposition—Historical Faith—Saving Faith—A
Subject of Prayer—not Meritorious—“Just as I
am.”

MY DEAR FRIEND—The importance of
Faith in the Christian scheme is very great.
It is represented in the Scriptures as a cardin-
al and indispensable point. In fact, till
Christianity appeared, faith was not recog-
nized as a prime element in religion at all.
Heathenism, it has been well said, had no
faith, because it had no truth. But in the
gospel system faith is fundamental; faith is
the *root-grace*.

The faith which the Scriptures require
must necessarily be very simple, since it is
required of all classes, conditions, and ages
of mankind. Some writers, imagining from
its importance in the scale that its dignity

must be enhanced by a certain degree of mystery and difficulty, have done their best to shroud the subject in fog, "darkening counsel by words without knowledge." But the gospel was not written for scholars and the learned—"unto the poor the gospel is preached"—and it must of course be preached in terms level to the comprehension of all. What are the terms of the gospel? They are but these two—*repent and believe*. So short and so simple are they that a child, an illiterate negro, a dying person whose mind is enfeebled as well as his body, are competent to understand and embrace them. "The wayfaring man, though a fool" in book-learning, "shall not err therein."

There is no mystery in the exercise of belief on all ordinary subjects of human testimony. We believe, without hesitation, the word of any credible witness. It would be deemed the height of absurdity in the traveller, the child, the invalid, the jury, or the army, to insist, as a preliminary step, on a lucid definition of faith—all its phases and varieties, its essence and its objects. In ordi-

nary life everybody understands what it is to believe. Is it not strange, that as soon as the term is introduced into religion, it should be enveloped in obscurity? It is this perversity of men that compels ministers to be at great pains to disentangle the naked truth from its complicated wrappings, and restore it to its original and scriptural simplicity. The main difficulty arises, not so much from the mysterious nature of the subject, as from an indisposition to believe. From the moment you have a genuine and sincere desire to believe, faith is easy. We readily believe that which we wish to believe. While on the contrary,

“He that’s convinced against his will,
Is of the same opinion still.”

Let it then be borne in mind, that besides the conviction produced by testimony, there is included a trustful disposition. There must be a willingness to believe. It is not said, Believe the Lord Jesus Christ—but, Believe *on* him; or again, Believe *in* him. Language could not more emphatically signify the idea of trust.

This leads to a discrimination between historical and saving faith. You believe that such a man as Julius Cæsar once lived, and that there is such a country as China; but you never received any benefit from Julius Cæsar, neither do you expect to visit China. Of course, your heart is perfectly indifferent to one and the other. It is a matter of no consequence to you whether the information be true or not. You feel no interest in it. To the historical fact you assent, but you have no enthusiasm upon the subject. In the same manner you have been brought up to believe that Jesus Christ lived and died, and that there is such a place as heaven. But if you have no personal interest in Jesus Christ, as a sinner longing to be saved by him, and if you feel no anxiety to get to heaven, these truths affect you no more than the existence of China or of Julius Cæsar. It is as much a historical faith in the one case as in the other, and no more.

To believe Jesus Christ, his existence, his truth, his gospel, in a historical way; and to believe on him as your own personal Saviour,

to whom you owe everything, and whom you should love enthusiastically and devotedly, are, you perceive, two very different matters. Oh, have you this saving faith, or is your faith a mere barren historical assent, floating in the head, but never warming the life-blood of your heart? Do you believe the gospel just as you believe the newspaper? or do you go farther, and believe on the Lord Jesus as the Saviour of the world, and your Saviour? Do you believe simply because your fathers believed, and as they believed, and because you have been brought up to believe? or has the gospel come to you "not in word only, but in power?" The habit of taking opinions on trust, and never thinking for ourselves, would make very respectable Turks of us, had we by chance been born in Turkey instead of Christendom.

Conscious of the paramount necessity, therefore, of a good disposition, pray, in the language of the father in Mark, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief!" and in the language of the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith!" The evidence is abundant, we need

not ask the Lord to give us more, but the will to receive what evidence there is. The fault and the deficiency are subjective altogether. Here comes in most beautifully the doctrine of the influences of the Holy Spirit. Just at the point where we feel that we need a supernatural power to help us, just there it is promised to our prayers. A Saviour and a Holy Spirit leave us nothing further to desire.

“The Spirit our petition writes,
And Christ receives and gives it in.”

And for the exercise of faith do you claim merit? Look at that wretch sinking in the river. A rope is thrown to him, just as he is going down. He seizes it, and is drawn safe to land. But no sooner does he find himself on shore, than he comes to you, dripping as he is, and asks to be paid for taking hold of the rope. Would you think he was sane? Or would you think the beggar any better, who counts it a great merit that he holds out his hand to receive the piece of money you drop into it?

“ Just as I am—without one plea,
 But that thy blood was shed for me,
 And that thou bidst me come to thee,
 O Lamb of God, I come !

Just as I am—and waiting not
 To rid my soul of one dark blot,
 To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
 O Lamb of God, I come !

Just as I am—though tossed about
 With many a conflict, many a doubt,
 Fightings within, and fears without,
 O Lamb of God, I come !

Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind ;
 Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
 Yea, all I need, in thee I find,
 O Lamb of God, I come !

Just as I am—thou wilt receive ;
 Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve ;
 Because thy promise I believe,
 O Lamb of God, I come !

Just as I am—thy love unknown
 Has broken every barrier down ;
 Now, to be thine, yea, thine alone,
 O Lamb of God, I come !”

LETTER V.

ON ASSURANCE.

Different Opinions—Assurance of Understanding—of Faith—of Hope—Witness of the Spirit—Hodge, Witsius—a Privilege—Duty to strive for it—Prayer of Faith—Looking for Answers.

MY DEAR FRIEND—You desire to know whether personal assurance is necessary. Different opinions have been entertained among divines on this subject. Some writers, as Marshall, Anderson, Wesley, and Malan, have laid great stress on personal assurance as a duty. Others look on it not so much as a duty as a privilege. While we all ought to strive for it, and while it is attainable by all, (“every one of you,” Heb. vi. 11,) it cannot be denied that some of the best Christians that have ever lived have not enjoyed it. I think I have known some such persons, whose piety was doubted by none but themselves.

All revealed truth is an object of faith; but assurance of personal salvation is nowhere revealed, and never has been revealed to any one except the penitent thief; therefore it is no object of saving faith. When it is said, "Thou shalt be saved," it is conditional upon believing in the Lord Jesus. It is not therefore a personal revelation, but a conditional grant. The promise is made not to individuals, but to a class defined by certain characteristics. Whoever belongs to that class is sure of the promise.

There are three sorts of assurance mentioned in the Scriptures: the assurance of *understanding*, Col. ii. 2; the assurance of *faith*, Heb. x. 22, and the assurance of *hope*, Heb. vi. 11. Of these that of understanding is the lowest, and that of hope the most exalted.

By the assurance of understanding is to be understood a clear, satisfactory, and implicit conviction of the truth of the gospel, and of the gospel system, its facts, its doctrines, its miracles, its prophecies. The man that has this assurance is raised above the region of

doubt, however he may have doubted before. His mind reposes with satisfaction on the conclusions he has reached. He is in no danger from scepticism or from fatal heresy. His greatest danger henceforth will be on the side of formalism. This state of mind is the assurance of understanding. It is altogether of an intellectual character.

The assurance of faith goes a step beyond this. It is of a practical and experimental nature. It receives the truth not only without doubts, but receives it cordially. It is a faith that works by love. There may be doubts of personal salvation, through misapprehension, through fear of unworthiness, through depression of spirits, and sometimes through sympathetic weakness or derangement of the bodily system, but there is a full persuasion of the certainty of salvation to all that lay hold on Christ, and a desire and willingness to be one of the number so saved. And this, I apprehend, is the general feeling of Christian people.

The assurance of hope transcends both the former. It is a pleasing and confident expect-

tation of salvation, and of going to heaven, which is as natural as for a man that has decided on a summer excursion, to think of the manner in which he shall spend his time, or the mode of conveyance that is to transport him. This persuasion is not grounded on any delusive, enthusiastic or superstitious foundation, but on rational and scriptural evidences.

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” Rom. viii. 16. Edwards, and others after him, interpret this as a comparison of our own state with the description of the Christian graces in the New Testament. The two, description and reality, correspond together, just as our two hands match, when laid side by side. But as the same Spirit wrought the one which described the other, it is the witness of the Spirit with our spirits. This is at least clear, intelligible, and free from all approach to enthusiasm. Such a comparison every believer ought to draw; and all feelings, emotions, joys, and raptures which do not co-exist with it, or which will not stand the application of such a test, should be rejected as spurious.

But I am led, from my own reflections upon this subject, and from the concurrent opinions of such judicious writers as Calvin, Witsius, and Dr. Hodge, to think that there is something more. A comparison, such as has been mentioned, is an isolated testimony, the testimony of our own consciences, independent of any direct act of the Holy Ghost. I am disposed, therefore, to agree with Dr. Hodge, when he says "there are two distinct sources of confidence" (see Com. on Rom. viii. 16); and with Witsius, when he says, "There is, moreover, *an internal instinct*, which no human language can explain. And the Spirit of God excites generous emotions, and the sweetest raptures and consolations, which cannot be supposed to flow from any other than a divine source." (Covenants, III. xi.) Some appear to err in confining assurance to the comparison above alluded to, thus making the operation exclusively intellectual. Is it necessary for a child to test his filial feelings by a diary? or does a patriot deliberately sit down to consult a civic barometer, before either will indulge the natural emotions of

gladness that well up and fill their hearts to overflowing? Is there not an "internal instinct" that tells the child he loves his parent, and the patriot he loves his country, by a shorter, more summary, and more genial process? Is religion a matter of the head alone, and not also of the heart?

The conclusion we come to is briefly this: The assurance of understanding is intellectual, the assurance of faith is experimental, and the assurance of hope is personal. It is our duty to give all diligence to obtain the latter; but the actual attainment of it is a privilege enjoyed by comparatively few. (See Dr. Scott's Com. on Heb. vi. 11.) So long, therefore, as you have a prevailing faith in the promises of God, and a prevailing desire to be conformed to his will, you need not distress yourself for the want of an exulting, rapturous, and undoubting assurance of your personal salvation. "Give all diligence" to attain it, and pray for increase of faith and of light, and for more of the Holy Spirit.

Some have insisted on what is called the *prayer of faith*, and that we must believe that

we shall receive the individual thing we ask for. But faith can only rest upon a promise, either express or implied. Where there is no such special promise, there can be no right to cherish such an expectation. Besides, the prayer of faith is a prayer that is indited by the Holy Spirit, and will, of course, be for things agreeable to the divine will; and such prayers, being prompted by God himself, no other sort of prayers will naturally bring with them an answer. But we have no right to dictate to the Almighty, or, Brahmin-like, to ascribe to the mere act of prayer a kind of semi-omnipotence. Always is it decorous to put in the proviso, "If it be agreeable to thy will."

There is no doubt, however, that we pray with too little of a realizing sense of God's being a prayer-answering God. We pray, and neglect to look for the answers to our prayers, as the ostrich leaves her eggs in the sand, and abandons them without another thought. This shows formality, and want of earnestness. While we are to abstain from anything that looks like dictating to God, we ought to be

earnest and sincere in our petitions. We cannot honour him more than by approaching his mercy seat with raised expectations and enlarged desires. He bids us open our mouth wide, and he will fill it. Psa. lxxxix. 10. Payson said that if it were necessary for God's glory and his good that he should have two worlds, he would ask for them with the utmost confidence that they would be granted.

LETTER VI.

ON HOLINESS.

Relative Holiness—Dark Ages—Heart Holiness—
Scripture Language—Usher's Definition—a gra-
dual Work—Encouragements to persevere.

MY DEAR FRIEND—As we found there were two kinds of repentance and faith, one genuine and the other insufficient, so we find it is with regard to holiness. There is a relative holiness, and there is heart-holiness.

Relative holiness consists in separating things from a common to a sacred use. One day is no more holy than another, but after being set apart to religious services, it is distinguished from all other days of the week. The use that is made of it is the essence of the whole matter. This is the kernel; the rest is the shell, mere outside work. It is this relative holiness that is meant when you read of holy vestments, and holy temples with

their sanctuaries. Many err by ignoring any other kind of holiness than this, and rest satisfied with external rites and ceremonies, holy days and holy places, as if they had fully complied with their duty. They fancy that if they were to die any moment, a holy sign is on them, and all is safe. They forget that baptisms, and crossings, and eucharists, and acts done to and upon the body, affect the body alone, viewed as a material act; and consequently, when the soul is separated from the body, such acts, done upon the body, can by no means affect the soul.

In the dark ages this superstition was carried to great lengths. When a sinner was about to expire, his friends brought, in a great hurry, some old monk's gown, supposed to be very holy because worn by a saintly man; and in this holy garment they wrapped the dying sinner, imagining that by this stratagem they could cheat the devil when he came after the soul, and make him believe it was not a wicked wretch, but a holy monk. Nay, such was their folly, if the case was urgent, and they could not envelope him in the whole garment, that

they thought it would be sufficient if they could but slip his arm into one of the sleeves. An easy way truly of getting to heaven! One hardly knows whether to sigh or to smile over such instances of human weakness.

That which externals but typify and point to, and without which they would be an empty husk, is nothing else than real heart-holiness. It is a release from the dominion and power of sin, from its pollution as well as its curse, from its stain as well as its consequences. It is a love of all that is good, and virtuous, and spiritually excellent. It is a panting after resemblance to the pure, immaculate, and sin-abhorring God. The holiness of the divine nature is its pattern and model, as it is mirrored in the word and law of God, and as it is visibly and impressively exhibited in the spotless character of the blessed Redeemer, who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." "There was no guile found in his lips." "He knew no sin," he knew not how to sin, and in him even the eye of Omniscience detected not the least flaw. "He left us an example that we should walk in his steps."

The Scriptures speak of holiness in very strong language, and language that implies the necessity of arduous effort; crucifixion to the world; mortifying (not the body, but) the deeds of the body; dying unto sin, and living unto righteousness. This is no easy task, no child's play, no amusement of mere carpet-knights. It is a race, a conflict, a warfare. The learned and pious Usher was once solicited to write a treatise on sanctification. After some reflection he professed his incapacity to do the subject justice. The more he thought upon it, the more its magnitude and importance grew upon his mind. "For what," said he, "is sanctification, but to offer one's self a whole burnt-offering in the flames of love upon the altar of God?"

Sanctification is, in this life, a gradual and a partial work. While I would not discourage you by demanding a perfection, at the very thought of which you are unnerved, I do not hesitate to urge you unremittingly to endeavour to attain maturity and ripeness of Christian experience.

Are you striving to gain the ascendancy

over sin, and are you making some progress in the work? Do you say, "I mourn that I have advanced so little, and am so far removed from what I ought to be? It is my daily lamentation that I can trace so little of the image of God in my character. Yet I do long, and pray, and strive to be more weaned from the world, and to be more conformed to the divine likeness." Are such the confessions you sigh forth? God forbid that I should drop one word to add unnecessary pain, or by ill-timed severity to drive you to despondency or despair. It is one of the most delightful parts of ministerial duty to comfort God's people, and to imitate the mild discretion of Him who will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.

While, then, it must be admitted that it is desirable for you to assume a firmer port and a more confident tone, yet would I not discourage you, but the reverse. We are authorized to believe that such feelings as those just described never sprang from earth, but are to be referred to the grace of God. The seed, though small as "a grain of mustard-

seed," or however tardy in germinating and bearing fruit, is yet "the incorruptible seed of the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." It was lodged in your bosom by no mortal hand. Persevere, continue to labour, endeavour to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," and "be not weary in well doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not."

LETTER VII.

ON ELECTION.

Free Agents—Man in the River—God's Plan—None saved unless he purposes to save them—Caricatures—Salvation of Infants—Epitaph—Duty plain—Decrees not revealed—Likelihood of repenting if this doctrine is not true—The initiative with God.

MY DEAR FRIEND—You are perplexed about the doctrine of election. You complain of its being a stumbling-block in your way. It is worth while to pay some attention to the subject.

God has constituted us moral agents. A free agent is one who can do what he wants to do. God has endowed us with perception, judgment, conscience, and will. But there is no self-determining power in the will. He has made us susceptible of the force of moral motives, and it is in view of motives that the will freely decides. He has made us voluntary and accountable agents. Our own ex-

perience attests it. No reasoning, however subtle, can shake our sense of it. Every pulse and fibre in our frame cry out that it is so. Every sinner knows that he sins most freely, and because he wants to sin, and not because any one forces him to do it. Every Christian knows how freely he acted in all the steps of his conversion. His own consciousness bears witness to the truthfulness of the direction, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God will not, we may be sure, in the business of conversion, violate the natural laws which he has himself established, or operate on our hearts contrary to their moral constitution. We cannot so grossly have misunderstood our consciousness and his word.

How then, you ask, is election compatible with free agency? How can we choose, when all the choosing is on the part of God? Some are so staggered by it, and have so insuperable a prejudice against the very word, (and often against nothing but the word,) that

they cannot be persuaded to take a step further. They resemble a man in the middle of a river, to whom a rope is thrown, but he will not touch it, till he is satisfied how it got there, of what it is made, and where the person was born who has hold of it. "Never mind that," he is told, "you are in danger of your life; take hold of the rope!" "No!" he replies, "I will not till I am satisfied." "Then you must go down," is the answer. And he goes down, to rise no more.

God *has* a plan by which he works, else he would be inferior in wisdom to the creatures he has made, not only to men, but to ants and beavers. And in the prosecution of his plan, he works by means, as he instructs us in his revealed word. We find both moral agency and divine purpose taught in the Scripture, and we so receive them. We cannot explain or reconcile them to our entire satisfaction. We are content to take them as we find them. We know that if God has no intention to save any of the race, then none can have any assured hope of salvation. All *may* be lost, and the Saviour will, in that

event, have died in vain. But we believe if any of us are saved, it will be because in his sovereign mercy he purposed to save us; and if any are lost, it will be because they were suffered to go on in their sins. None will be lost that did not deserve to be lost. None will be saved but through the undeserved mercy of God. And this is the whole and entire doctrine of election, or predestination, or divine purpose, which is such a bugbear to many.

Those who make a caricature of the views of our church on this subject, take special care to omit her distinct recognition of "the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently;" (Conf. of F. v. 2. ;) of God being in no sense "the author of sin;" (Conf. of F. v. 4. ;) and of all that perish, perishing not in consequence of an arbitrary reprobation, but "for their sin," (Conf. of F. iii. 7.) To leave out all these qualifications, and then make a scare-crow of the doctrine, is uncandid and unfair in the extreme.

They tell you that we teach there are infants in hell a span long. Do not believe a

word of it. It is a vile and unmitigated slander. I unequivocally, in behalf of all my brethren, disavow and deny it, as well as every other perversion, fathered on us, that makes God a tyrant. Such misrepresentations can have originated only in the grossest ignorance, or the most hostile malignity, or both. Dismiss this objection from your mind at once, and for ever. It is not worth entertaining. We believe that dying infants have the stain of original sin washed away by the blood of Christ, and that otherwise they could not take part in the new song. On no other ground can we prove their admission to heaven at all. The following beautiful epitaph, by Mr. Robinson of England, exhibits the views of Calvinists with strict correctness :

“Bold Infidelity, turn pale, and die!

Beneath this stone four infants' ashes lie:

Say, are they lost or saved?

If death's by sin, they sinned because they're here;

If heaven's by works, in heaven they can't appear:

Reason, ah! how depraved!

Revere the Bible's page; the knot's untied;

They died, for Adam sinned;—they live, for Jesus
died.”

Why does any one dislike the doctrine of the divine purpose? Conceive it set aside. Is not repentance a scriptural doctrine? Why do you not repent? Is not regeneration a scriptural doctrine? Why are you not converted? Is not faith a scriptural doctrine? Why do you not believe? If you repent, believe, and are converted, you may be assured of salvation; election, or no election. Whether this doctrine is true or not, you must repent, believe and be converted, or you never will be saved. If you do not think your heart so desperately wicked as to require a God to change it, prove it by becoming a Christian; or else do not blame us for thinking that you need a supernatural assistance.

Who knows anything of the decrees of God? The only decree that he has revealed is one that we are all concerned with, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." In these words you see the character you must possess if you would get to heaven. You may endeavour, as Nettleton said, to effect this on the easiest terms you can find out from the Scriptures;

only secure the grand result. If you truly repent, and the doctrine of election be true, it can do you no harm. But whether it be true or not, your duty is plain; you must repent, believe, and be converted, or you are lost for ever!

Only one thought more let me leave with you, as an inducement to cease relying on your own strength, and to cry mightily to God to help you. Since you must repent or perish, what reason have you, judging from your past experience and your past success, to suppose you ever will repent, *if the doctrine of election is not true?* "O Lord," cried the Psalmist, "pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." Psa. xxv. 11. So great is our guilt, that we can do nothing ourselves for its removal; so great is it, that if left to ourselves, we can have no hope; so great is it, that unless God have mercy on us, we are undone! "Not that we loved God," says the apostle, "but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John iv. 10. "Not that we loved God;" no! we hated him, we resisted him

with all our might; all we asked was, with Ephraim, "Let us alone!" Had the initiatory step depended on us, we must have perished for ever. Blessed be his name, he did not leave us to ourselves; "we love him," continues the apostle just quoted, "because he *first* loved us." 1 John iv. 19.

LETTER VIII.

ON PRAYER.

Hours of Prayer—Col. Gardiner—Collecting our thoughts—The Bible furnishes matter for Prayer—Praying aloud—Spirit of Prayer—Praying for others—Wings of the Soul.

MY DEAR FRIEND—Prayer without watching is superstition; watching without prayer is presumption.

Pray regularly at least twice a day. On no account omit it. Take advantage of the earliest opportunity upon rising, before the world has a chance to distract your thoughts. And neglect not the duty in the evening, when you are about to commit yourself to that slumber, which is so like death that it should not be trusted without prayer. That exemplary Christian, Col. Gardiner, when he was to march before daybreak, made a point of rising still earlier to have time for reading and prayer. If you find that you are gene-

rally fagged out at bed-time, you had better select an hour in advance, and devote a few minutes to this exercise when you are more fresh and wakeful. Sleepy prayers never rise high.

Call to mind before you kneel down, that you are now going into the presence of the heart-searching God; the creature is about to meet his Creator, the friend is about to meet his Friend, the needy his Benefactor, the child his Father. Pause, and try to feel as you ought.

Think beforehand what you will say. Be not rash with thy mouth to utter anything before God. Eccl. v. 2. See if there is not some special need that rises uppermost. It may be that you feel most the pressure of sin; pray then for the pardon of sin. It may be that you long for more holiness; let that be the burden of your petitions. It may be that you feel you are such a poor creature that you are always doing something wrong; pray then for an increase of strength. It may be that the predominant desire that rises to your mind, is that your companion,

your brother, your sister, your bosom friend, may be converted. Bring them in the arms of your faith, and lay them down at the feet of Jesus. Whichever of these or like feelings is most prominent, allot it the chief place in your petitions.

It will be well, to give unity and directness to your meditations, as well as to put words into your mouth, first to read a passage of the Bible. This will settle and compose your mind. If you feel at a loss for matter of prayer, take up verse by verse, and use it in a devotional manner. Let it be, for example, the first Psalm. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." Turn it into a petition thus: "O Lord! may I be thus blessed! keep me from walking in the counsel of the ungodly!" "But his delight is in the law of the Lord." "Lord! help me to delight in thy law!" Or let it be the second chapter of 1 John. "And if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "Blessed Jesus! be my advocate with the Father, and procure the pardon of my sins!"

It is not necessary to particularize further. You catch the idea. Let me then advise you, in order to furnish yourself with copious materials and language for prayer, to read not only, but also to commit to memory, large portions of Scripture. You will find them especially useful at times when you are unable to read, when you are sick, or travelling, and your memory may serve you instead of a book. The book of Psalms is recommended to us by apostolic example as a manual of devotion. The xxiii, li, and ciii Psalms, are pre-eminently suitable to be impressed on the memory.

Pray aloud or in a whisper. The advantage of this is to keep your thoughts collected. It will tend to banish wandering thoughts, and concentrate the attention.

Endeavour to maintain the spirit of prayer. On all trying occasions have your mind in a frame or readiness to pray. That is what the apostle means, when he says, "Pray without ceasing." If sudden temptations present themselves, cry inwardly, "O Lord, preserve me from sin!" "O Lord, direct me to the

best course to pursue!" "Preserve me from anger, and hasty words! Let me not lose my temper!" This is called ejaculatory prayer; because we ejaculate or dart upwards our messages to heaven, and thus make known our pressing wants.

Pray for others. Christianity is not selfish. If you always think of yourself, and pray only for yourself, it will not be wonderful if you are in darkness half the time. When the Rev. Mr. Beecher, of Shepherds-town, Va., (now deceased,) was in Princeton Seminary, he fell into great doubt as to his spiritual state, and even entertained thoughts of giving up the ministry. Determined, however, if he could not be heard for himself, still to pray for others, he presented the case of the unconverted exclusively before the mercy-seat. From that moment peace revisited his soul. To feel for others is the best exercise and evidence of a gracious state. 1 John iii. 14. The petition, "Thy kingdom come!" "precedes the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread!"

Prayer is the language of dependence.

Did you ever see a little bird whose wings were broken; how it fluttered, and tried to fly, but the poor little thing always came to the ground? Prayer and faith are the wings by which our souls rise above the world and mount to heaven. If either of them fail, it is like bruising a wing; we creep along, we cannot soar, we cannot rise to God. We may conceal our mishap by sitting still; but if a higher flight is demanded, our crippled condition is speedily detected. May you, my friend, ever have the eye and the wing of an eagle. Isa. xl. 31.

Prayer is the Christian's breath. Live near the cross, and near the mercy-seat, and you will live near the gate of heaven.

You may peruse with advantage Watts's or Bickersteth's Treatises on Prayer.

LETTER IX.

ON THE SCRIPTURES.

Two Mongol Tartars—Scriptures clear—Aid of the Holy Spirit—Read regularly—not as a Task—in course—with Dictionaries and Commentaries—in a Devotional spirit—Chrysostom—Byron's lines.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I was once very much struck with an incident narrated of two Mongol Tartar chiefs. It seems that a German clergyman engaged them to assist him in preparing a translation of the gospels into their language. At length the task was done, the last correction made, and the book closed. They continued sitting, serious and silent. The minister inquired the cause, and was equally surprised and delighted to hear both avow themselves converts to the truth of the blessed volume. "At home," said they, "we studied the sacred writings of the Chinese, and the more we read the obscurer

they grew. But the longer we read the gospel, the simpler and clearer it becomes; until at last it seems as if Jesus was talking with us!"

This is a very pleasing tribute to the excellence of the sacred Scriptures; and it is just such as might be expected from their natural and unpretending style. It is the unvarnished style of truth, and therefore it goes straight to the heart at once.

When once it enters to the mind,
It spreads such light abroad,
The meanest souls instruction find,
And raise their thoughts to God.

I might say many things in favour of studying the Bible, but they are obvious, and you must often have met with them. What I desire in these letters is to give you a few plain, simple, practical directions, which you are not likely to meet elsewhere; yet which, simple as they are, you may be pleased to receive, and may find useful.

The first thing I would recommend you to do, is to pray for the assistance of the

Holy Spirit. This is what the pious psalmist did. "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" This short verse you can easily repeat when you open the sacred page. Surely you recognize the propriety of asking the divine Author of the Bible, to help you to understand what he has inspired.

Regularly read a portion morning and evening. Let nothing prevent your daily devotion. Try to make everything suit in the economizing of your time, to secure an opportunity for reading and prayer. You think it hard if you are interrupted in taking your three daily meals. Will less than two suffice for the food of your soul? "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice." Psa. lv. 17.

Do not prescribe any given number of chapters or verses. There is danger of coming to look on it either as a merit or a task. Read as much, slowly and carefully, as will profit you, and neither more nor less.

Read in course. The gospels, epistles,

and Psalms, are considered best to engage the attention of a person whose thoughts are for the first time turned to religion. But as your experience enlarges, you will find it of use to read the other books, historical and prophetic, also. The historical books of the Old Testament are very instructive. Some read the Old Testament in course one part of the day, and the New in course the other part. Others read regularly through from the beginning. If you read the New Testament first, you will find the subsequent study of the Old throwing great light upon the New. On the Sabbath you will have leisure to read a larger portion than on week days. On the Sabbath the sacrifices were doubled. Num. xxviii. 9.

Endeavour to understand what you read. Provide yourself with a good Bible Dictionary, and a good Commentary. Jacobus's Notes on Matthew are excellent, and will no doubt soon be followed by a second volume. Hodge's Notes on Romans is a standard work, and will ground you in evangelical doctrine. Keep your ears open also to the ex-

planations of difficult passages from the pulpit. And whatever you read, try to get a clear idea of its meaning and connection. A little read with understanding, will do more good than a great quantity without.

Read in a devotional spirit. While you should familiarize yourself with the geography, the antiquities, and the criticism of the Bible, you should above all bear in mind the duty of reading for a devotional purpose. And there are times when you should totally lay aside the critic, and read with no other view than this. At no time should this predominant object be overlooked. Bring the verse and the doctrine home; make it a personal matter; apply it to your own case. "Sanctify them through thy truth." John xvii. 17. The word of God is to make us holy. Do not forget this. You ought to saturate your heart with its spirit. You should remember particular passages to fortify yourself against temptation. "Thy word have I hid in my heart," said David, "that I might not sin against thee." It was by nimbly wielding this sword of the Spirit, our

Saviour foiled the tempter. "It is written," retorted he, "it is written!"

Let no ordinary cause keep you from your Bible a single day. You would think it strange, says Chrysostom, of a smith, mason, or carpenter, to sell or pledge his tools; now what their saw, and chisel, and hammer, and axe are to them, the Scriptures are, in a certain sense, to you. They are the instruments of your salvation.

The following lines are said to have been written on the fly leaf of a Bible by Lord Byron:

Within this awful volume lies
The Mystery of Mysteries.
Happiest they of human race,
To whom their God hath given grace
To read, to learn, to mark, to pray,
To lift the latch, and force the way!
But better he had ne'er been born,
Who reads to doubt, or reads to scorn!

LETTER X.

ON READING.

We are as our Books—Goethe—List of Books—What not to be read—Light Reading—The dying Novel Reader—Deadening effect of Novel Reading on Religion—Goldsmith's Opinion—Moore—Macready—Schiller—Instances.

MY DEAR FRIEND—It was a weighty remark of a wise man, “he that walketh with the wise shall be wise; but the companion of fools shall be destroyed.” Books are the companions of our private hours, and we should be particular about the sort of book we take to our bosom. We are apt to catch the spirit of the writer, and to adopt insensibly his way of thinking. As our books and newspapers are, so are we. One of the maxims of the celebrated Goethe was, that we ought to read something in a good book every day.

Thanks to the prolific press, we have an abundant supply of profitable reading. It is not easy now to make a selection. Allow me to enumerate some that occur to my mind. Waterbury's Advice to a Young Christian; James's and Henry's Anxious Inquirer; Hodge's Way of Life; Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress with Scott's notes; Taylor's Holy Living; Owen on Spiritual-mindedness; Bethune's History of a Penitent; Doddridge's Rise and Progress; Scougal's Life of God in the Soul; Baxter's Saints' Rest; Wilberforce's Practical View; Hannah More's Practical Piety, and Life of St. Paul; Nevins's Practical Thoughts; Alexander's Religious Experience; Jay's Exercises; Winslow's Midnight Harmonies; Winslow on the Spirit, and on Declension; John Newton's Letters; Hamilton's Life in Earnest, and Mount of Olives; Lives of Martyn, Richmond, Payson, Brainerd, McCheyne, Isabella Graham, Mary Lundy Duncan, etc. etc. These and various other like works, will be of eminent service in informing the mind, and promoting growth in grace. And perhaps I might add to the

above, although they are of a purely denominational cast, Dr. Miller's Tracts on Presbyterianism, and Baptism; and a recent work by a Lady, in three parts, entitled "Why am I a Presbyterian?" It is well for us to be able to give "a reason for the hope that is within us, to every one that asketh us, with meekness and fear."

And while I venture to suggest what it will be edifying to read, permit me to drop a hint as to what you ought not to read.

There is a species of literature that is every where to be met with, under the well-known name of light reading. Scott was its Coryphæus, and his success has tempted a thousand imitations,

"In one weak, washy, everlasting flood."

You meet it in various shapes and disguises; the two-volume novel, the two-shilling romance, the fashionable monthly, and the trashy tale in the newspaper.

Far be it from me, in a spirit of fanatical bigotry, indiscriminately to proscribe all fiction, when Christ employed it for purposes

of instruction ; or to refuse to the overtasked mind an innocent or rational recreation. But I must be allowed to say, that like some of the medicines of the pharmacopœia, this sort of reading requires a great deal of caution. It is best to err on the safe side, and to take too little rather than too much. I knew a lady who completely used up her stock of sensibility, by devouring novels at the rate of fifty or a hundred a year ; and when she came to a dying bed, (and it was an awful one,) her complaint was that she could not feel. "I am going," she said to me, as she wildly tossed her arms and her dishevelled hair, "I am going, and without a ray of hope !"

There are some things, as Sue's *Wandering Jew*, and *Mysteries of Paris*, which I am not ashamed to confess I know only by reputation : and that reputation is sufficient. If for "every idle word" we speak, we are to give an account in the day of judgment, what is to be done with the idle words we read ? much more, with what is really reprehensible ? Miss Edgeworth's *Tales* are probably among

the best; yet so good a man as Robert Hall confessed, that it was some time before he could get rid of the benumbing effect they had on his personal piety. The reason is obvious; there is no religion in them.

Novel-reading, loose poetry, and theatrical entertainments, should be shunned by all who desire to cultivate that spiritual-mindedness "which is life and peace," life to the soul, and peace to the conscience. Nor let any one denounce the sentiment as narrow-minded or puritanical. The heaviest censures upon recreations of this sort come from the authors themselves.

Goldsmith, himself a popular novelist and playwright, gave this advice about the education of his nephew. "Above all things, never let your son touch a novel or romance. How delusive, how destructive are those features of consummate bliss! They teach the youthful to sigh after beauty and happiness that never existed; to despise the little good that fortune has mixed in our cup, by expecting more than she ever gave; and in general—take the word of a man who has

seen the world, and studied it more by experience than by precept—take my word for it, I say, that such books teach us very little of the world.”

Add to this testimony the pregnant facts, that Moore kept his voluptuous lines from the sight of his own daughters; and that the tragedian Macready has never allowed his children to frequent, or even to see the inside of a theatre. Are not these men good authority?

But we are not left to theory and inference alone. Schiller's *Robbers* tempted so many youths to the highway, that the Government had to forbid the representation. For a like reason, the *Beggars' Opera* by Gay was prohibited by the British Government. Even the Chinese authorities have discountenanced stage-plays, as tending to make the spectators adepts in vice. Courvoisier, who murdered his master, was an admirer of Paul Clifford. Lovet, who was executed at Louisville, was an imitator of Jack Sheppard. Poor Spencer, who was strung up to the yard-arm, learned his lessons out of the *Pirate's*

Own Book. The errors of the unhappy woman who figured in the Richmond tragedy, which terminated in her own disgrace and the death of her lover, were traced by her father to her passion for French novels.

A Christian who enjoys the presence of God, is superior to vulgar excitements, and tastes a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

LETTER XI.

ON DOING GOOD.

Object of Existence—being good and kind—speaking in favour of Religion—writing to Friends—Books—Church—Sabbath-schools—Children—Opportunity—Mather—Martyn—Sins of Omission.

MY DEAR FRIEND—What did God send you here to do? What does he delight to do himself? What did the Saviour, whom you love, make the business of his whole life?

You may do good by being good. Example is more forcible than precept. Be correct. Be conscientious. Many careless, though well-meaning persons, are sad stumbling-blocks. Be respectful to your parents and to the aged. Be amiable. Then every body will love you, and love religion for your sake.

You may do good by being kind and benevolent. If any one is sick, whether

acquaintances, strangers, or the poor, you can send them little delicacies, sit up with them at night, and if you visit them, talk cheerfully with them. It has vexed me to see people come into a sick room, and tell the invalid about every one that was sick or dead in the neighbourhood. Such persons are walking bills of mortality. It is a very important thing to know how to take care of the sick. You should find out and relieve the poor, particularly by giving or procuring them work. You should not only aid the benevolent societies, but have a little charity-purse of your own. James ii. 16.

You can drop a word in favour of religion. It need not be much. It should not be formal. If your heart is engaged, it will come easily and naturally; even a look will make an impression. What you say should be well-timed, and, in general, when no one else is by. Most persons are ashamed to be spoken to before witnesses, even before a child. Pride braces them up immediately. You might merely say, "I wish you were a Christian; you would be so much happier." Or, "I

wish you would read the Bible more ; I am sure you would be benefitted." A word in season, how good is it !

You can write to your friends. Introduce a sentence or two, which, by the blessing of God, may awaken attention. I knew a remarkable instance of conversion resulting from a letter by Mr. Alexander, now a missionary in the Sandwich Islands. Another case I may mention was this. A letter written by a young man who had just become pious, was received by his friend as he was on the point of going to the opera. He tarried to read the letter, but there was no opera seen by him that night. On his knees he was begging the pardon of his sins.

You can lend or present interesting religious books. The first is perhaps the surest ; for one would be ashamed to return a book without having read it, and it can go through more hands in this way.

You should persuade your companions to go to church, or to religious meetings, and so bring them under a good influence. This is a duty very much neglected.

You should take a class in the Sabbath-school, or engage in some similar active walk of usefulness. I once asked a veteran teacher what her success had been. She told me, that of thirty scholars all were in the church, or in heaven, but one; and that one was prevented from joining the church by her father. A class of thirty, and all pious! What an encouragement to faithful teachers!

Remember the domestics. It is too often forgotten that they have souls. But you must instruct them with judgment and patience. Keep their interest awake. A little at a time, and often repeated, is the secret of success. They must be fed, not crammed. The same advice applies to younger brothers and sisters. Never show them an appearance of ill humour.

Opportunity is duty. "Our opportunities to do good," says Cotton Mather, "are our talents." I wish you could read Mather's "Essays to do good." Dr. Franklin acknowledged himself greatly indebted to them. Abbott's "Way to do good," will richly repay a perusal. If you look into the life of

Henry Martyn, you will find him sometimes reproaching himself that he had not given a tract on the river bank, or improved some occasion of speaking to the heathen. Our sins of omission ought to trouble us a great deal more than they do. I once visited a dying statesman, who had been prominent in the councils of his country. As I attempted to unfold the encouragements with which the Scriptures abound, he interrupted me with the exclamation, "But oh, my omissions!" my omissions!" This was the burden that lay heavy on his soul. How acquitted and relieved conscience feels when we have done our duty! Kings might envy the happiness. "Do good unto all men, as you have opportunity."

LETTER XII.

ON JESUS ONLY.

Jesus in the Pulpit—in Redemption—Feelings not to be put in the place of Christ—Comfort wanted without Christ — Ordinances — Forms — Duties — Troubles — Death—Meditations of heaven.

MY DEAR FRIEND—Like the disciples on the holy mount, you should see “Jesus only.”

Ministers should present Jesus only in their preaching. But you may say, “What have I to do with that? I am one of the laity.” You have a great deal to do with it. Let ministers fall into a cold, dry, slipshod, unedifying, or affected way of preaching; let them lecture on politics, or ethics, or criticism, or mere matters of taste; let them turn the house of God into a sort of forum, or Sunday opera; without leading the minds and hearts of their hearers to Jesus Christ and his salvation; whose souls, allow me to ask

you, will suffer? Keep the ministers of Christ, I warn and charge you, on your heart and in your prayers, for your own sake, and for the everlasting welfare of others as well as yourself.

In the work of redemption you should see "Jesus only." Sinners hide behind the perverted doctrines of man's inability and God's sovereignty. They say they must wait God's time; they pretend that they are using the means; they pray for a new heart; they try to repent; they lean on or imitate the experience of somebody else; they trust to the prayers of pious relatives, a godly grandmother Lois, or a devout mother Eunice, for instance. They read the Bible and good books; they think they are in a very good way; they break off from some sins, like Herod, and hear searching preaching gladly; they hope that if they do what they can, God will overlook the rest. They cling to anything in order to evade the direct and immediate duty of submitting to God, receiving Christ, and yielding to the appropriate influences of the gospel.

Inquirers sometimes put their feelings in

the place of Christ. They imagine that they do not feel enough, and if they could only feel as much as some one else appears to have done, they will have reached the precise point at which God may find it consistent to bless them. This is something quite independent of the atonement of Christ. It is nothing else than working up the feelings to a certain required pitch, so as to feel justified in coming to the table of the Lord.

Others commit the mistake of wanting comfort without Christ. It is not "Jesus only," but Jesus with his rich stores of various blessings that they covet, while they are reluctant to embrace the Saviour himself, and for himself. What would the young woman say to the suitor, who should confess that he longed to possess her dowry, but considered the owner an incumbrance? Be ashamed of the selfishness that wants Jesus for his treasure alone, and not for himself; Jesus, the most lovely and admirable object in the world; Jesus, who deserves to be loved, though he should come with both hands empty. Because you do not find comfort as soon as you

expected, will you therefore go away, and give up your serious thoughts, and say, "It is of no use to try?" While you are complaining, "Oh, that I could enjoy religion!" where is your sense of guilt? Cease to look at yourself as a poor unfortunate sufferer, and look on yourself as a justly condemned sinner. Look upon Christ as holding your pardon in his hands; fly to him, make no reserves, take his yoke, and bear his burden. That is your present and urgent duty.

We should see "Jesus only" in the ordinances. It is our duty to read, to pray, to go to church, to receive the sacraments, to avail ourselves of the services of the ministers of Christ; but we are to avoid depending on the use of these means of grace as if it were meritorious. Like the simple altar of stone on which no tool was to be lifted, on peril of polluting it, Ex. xx. 25, Christ's work is complete; we cannot add to it, nor improve upon it. He has done all; there is nothing left for us to do but to receive the benefits of his merits, mediation, and intercession with simple and childlike faith.

There is a tendency to allow religion to degenerate into a matter of form. Nor does the simplicity of the form serve as a sufficient safeguard. These forms grow stiff and stereotyped, and the heart ossifies beneath their tight constriction. Human nature is always under a temptation to substitute something human in the place of Christ, and to depend on some meritorious, sacramental, or sacerdotal medium; forgetting that "other foundation can no man lay than what is laid." Not even priestly intervention is admissible between God and the soul. "Christ is all, and in all."

"Jesus only" is to be the life of our duties. "To live is Christ." Our strength comes through him, and love to him is the reigning motive of all our actions. A new motive is thus superadded even to the ordinary relations of life. The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and husbands are to love their wives, even as Christ also loved the church. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord; and parents are to bring up their children in

his nurture and admonition. Servants are to be the servants of Christ; and masters are to remember that they have a Master in heaven. Churches are to know them that are over them in the Lord; and ministers are their servants for Jesus' sake. Thus you see that Christ is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the ending, even of our religious duties.

We should have recourse to "Jesus only" in our troubles. Like the disciples of John the Baptist, if bereft of our staff and stay, we should put ourselves under the protection of the cross, and go and "tell Jesus." He will whisper, "Fear not, it is I." Peter saw his Lord walking on the water, and threw himself into the sea to go to him. But when he found the billows tumbling in upon him, and their noise stunning his ear, he thought only of the danger, and forgot to look at the Saviour. That moment he began to sink. Then alarmed at his situation, he once again looked to Christ, and with the despair of a drowning man, cried "Save, Lord, or I perish!" Christ extended his hand, and sustained him,

rebuking him for his little faith. The moment he looked to Christ, he rose buoyant again above the waves.

In the closing hour we should see "Jesus only." That is no time for ingenious speculation, subtle distinctions, and elaborate arguments; what the dying man wants is the repose of faith. What he wants is to be able to say with Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He wants to feel the everlasting arms underneath him, and to stay himself upon the promises.

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are;
While on his breast I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there."

"Jesus only" should be the prominent object in our meditations of heaven. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." The glorified Lamb occupies "the midst of the throne." The astonished seer beheld no sun there, for the Lamb was the light thereof. Neither was there any temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple

of it. And the fountain of the river of life proceeded out of the throne of God and the Lamb. If Jesus be absent, paradise would be shorn of its splendour, its harps would thrill in vain, and its fragrant odours lose half their sweetness. In life, in death, on earth, and in heaven, the wish of the Christian's heart is Jesus, and "Jesus only."

"Jesus only
Can do helpless sinners good."

THE END.