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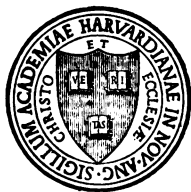
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FORTY-ONE LETTERS
ON
RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS,

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED UNDER THE SIGNATURES OF

OMICRON AND VIGIL;

AND

FOURTEEN LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO THE REV. MR. B—.

BY REV. JOHN NEWTON,

LATE RECTOR OF ST. MARY'S, WOOLNOTH, AND ST. MARY, WOOLCHURCH,
LONDON.

WITH

A PREFACE,

BY REV. ELISHA P. SWIFT,

Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh.

PITTSBURGH:
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1831.

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PREFACE.

THE standing and reputation of the Rev. JOHN NEWTON in the religious world is so well known and so highly appreciated, and his writings so decidedly speak for themselves, that it seems an almost useless service, to say any thing in commendation of either. As Mr. Newton however, was a remarkable instance of the power of divine grace, and as these LETTERS naturally suggest a few thoughts which may be not unprofitably weighed in connexion with their perusal, we shall advert to some things in the history of the author, and the character and design of this portion of his epistolary compositions.

Having been, in early life, deprived of the counsels and care of an excellent and pious mother, and taking to a sea-faring life, Mr. Newton became a youth of headstrong and unbridled passions, and though, possessed of strong intellectual powers, and some taste for reading, he sunk, in consequence of his own misconduct and the turns of his eventful life, into the lowest state of moral and physical degradation. At one time, we see him on the slave coast of Africa, in the relation of a menial servant, reduced by sickness, almost to the gates of death, and, in this suffering condition, in want of the necessaries of a common subsistence. On three other occasions, the boat, into which some accident prevented him from going, was speedily lost. His preservation from shipwreck and famine, at another, between Africa and Ireland, was as wonderful as his escape from death at another, when in the only fit of intoxication in which he ever indulged, he was just in the act of leaping overboard, when his safe recovery would have been impossible. Not less astonishing were the "two chances by which a companion in one instance cut down his hammock, and in another, lighted a smoke on the slave coast with the result of which, the whole change in his after life seemed mysteriously linked." Thus, when almost given up by his friends, and after having been often snatched by a remarkable providence from instant death, and after having wandered long and far from the paths of virtue and piety, he becomes the subject of deep and abiding impressions of religion while at sea, and in the end, through the singular mercy and grace of God, a distinguished and devoted servant of God. With the events of a life in which every thing seemed remarkable and providential, the subsequent conversion and eminent usefulness of this extraordinary man very nearly corresponded. To the power of divine grace on his own soul, more than to his intellectual endowments or subsequent literary attainments, was he indebted for that high religious eminence to which he attained, and that important ministerial service which for many years he rendered to the established church of England. As a minister of Christ, he was in his lifetime greatly honored in turning many unto righteousness, and his

writings, since his death, it is believed, have been extensively blessed to the spiritual good of many. The epistolary part of Newton's works give us the best view of the cast of his own mind, and the best specimen of his talents, his experimental knowledge and elevated piety: and that part of them which is republished in this little volume, is chiefly devoted to the discussion of subjects of great practical importance and general interest.

Among the excellences which appear in all the published letters of Newton, we may mention,

1. In the first place, the grand *design*—the high and holy *object* which he seems to propose in all he speaks and writes, and which never seems absent from his mind. To work for his divine master "*while the day of life lasts*"—to lead others to the knowledge of Christ and a life of habitual communion with God, and to keep religion, God, and eternity in constant view, amidst all the changes of life, as that which chiefly concerns immortal beings, and that which they are most prone to forget, seems to be the purpose and design of this extraordinary man in every epistle which he writes. Thus the little incidents of private history—the changes in public affairs, and the religious opinions and customs of communities, are frequently and familiarly adverted to, as they afford lessons of gratitude to God—unfold the certainty and beneficence of his providence, and as they call to mind errors, sins or infirmities to be corrected and improved, or duties to be fulfilled. Every thing he hears and sees, and feels, seems almost spontaneously to connect itself with religion, and every thing in his hand is converted to a divine and heavenly use. With that simplicity, and candor, and plainness which are consistent with the utmost tenderness and affection, he explains and applies the truth to all with whom he communicates, and a desire to instruct, and quicken, and improve, rather than to entertain or surprise the reader, is in all these letters a most prominent feature.

2. Another trait in Mr. N's. character as a letter-writer, and which imparts great interest as well as utility to his writings, is, *his knowledge of human nature*, and his close observation of men and things. Habits of close observation and discrimination seem to have been natural to him, and hence in all the varied operations of nature, and of grace, in his own heart and that of others,—in all the modes of reasoning and acting—in a perception of the weak points—the unavoidable imperfections of measures and of men, he discovers a practical knowledge of man, and of human life, which astonishes and interests the reader. He is often surprised to see how much that is important and instructive Newton could say in a few words,—how easily he could strip the busy world, or the plodding heart of its disguises and present them clearly before the mind as they really are: how readily he could enter the sanctuary of his own breast, unfold its latent springs of action, and in a familiar manner, thus impart to others a knowledge of themselves—their motives, errors and mistakes, on points most useful and material, and to an extent which they were unprepared to anticipate. This talent of developing the operations of the mind on the great matter of religion, and presenting to it a picture of itself, not only gives

attraction to what is written, so as to secure its being read, but by fixing the attention, prepares the way for useful and lasting impression.

3. There is in Newton's Letters, a *style and manner of composition, admirably suited to the nature and objects of epistolary communications*. There is a certain brief, sententious presentment of truth, much in the form of sacred maxims, in these letters, which, when interwoven with lively descriptions, close applications, and presented in familiar, affectionate, colloquial language, constitutes one of the best and happiest methods of enlightening the judgment, and moving and influencing the heart. There will occur many useful statements and proverbial sayings, in such a case, which will fasten themselves in the memory, and be revered from the kind and affectionate manner in which they were stated, and the wisdom and good sense which they display. Thus it has happened that the letters of this eminent man, have gone further to shape the character and practical opinions of common christians, than many other works of much larger size, and more labored investigation.

4. But that which forms the most prominent feature in the character of these letters is the *uncommon degree of experimental knowledge of the power of godliness*, which they every where exhibit. It is true of Newton above most practical writers, that his best suggestions, his happiest thoughts, and most lucid, useful remarks, are the result of his own experience and actual observation. In consequence of this they come forth with the fervor, and freshness, and boldness of original thought, and are stated with all that clearness and force with which man naturally communicates whatever it has cost him labor to learn, or skill and ingenuity to discover. As true religion is chiefly concerned in searching into, and trying the motives, dispositions and affections of the soul, as that on which the *Spirit of God*, through the instrumentality of the *word* acts, and by which he sways the life and conduct, no information can be more useful, and no class of spiritual physicians more profitable than those which help religious persons in the practical examination, and regulation of their motives and affections. To those who desire to make religion the science of salvation, as that salvation consists in a deliverance from the influence and tendencies of sin, and the cultivation of actual holiness of heart and life, Newton will consequently be found a *scribe well instructed in the things of the kingdom*, and afford much aid to sincere christians in all the difficulties and encouragements of habitual and experimental piety. Thus these letters are fitted to impress the mind of the reader with a feeling of individual interest and concern in whatever practical subject is discussed. The mind seems led to converse with itself—to dwell upon those topics which have an immediate relation to its eternal welfare; and it is thus won insensibly to apply the common truths of the gospel to its own conviction and practical improvement.

All just and enlightened views of christianity have a tendency to disengage the heart from earthly and temporal things and fill its

thoughts with those loftier and more durable objects of contemplation, and of desire, which the bible presents to man. No person, therefore, who considers seriously, the overpowering influence of earth and time over his own thoughts and actions, and those of men around him, will think meanly of any performance which aims, with any fair pretensions to success, to counteract this influence; or fail of wishing it every degree of prosperity. With these views this little volume is now sent into the world, with the hope, that as God has been pleased greatly to bless these letters as well as the others from the same pen in times past, so he may deign also to make these again the power of God unto salvation unto some who may read them. The sinner who reflects upon the astonishing grace of which the author was himself an instance, will not see cause to despair of mercy if he is disposed to turn to God; nor will the christian fail, on beholding the eminent attainments to which such a convert rose, to feel self-rebuke for his own defects, and new excitement in view of the riches of divine grace, to run in the way of God's commandments.

E. P. SWIFT.

Pittsburgh, May 16, 1831.

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LETTERS

ON

RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS.

LETTER I.

ON TRUST IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD, AND BENEVOLENCE TO HIS POOR.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE more I think of the point you proposed to me, the more I am confirmed to renew the advice I then gave. There is doubtless such a thing as christian prudence; but, my friend, beware of counterfeits. Self-love, and the evil heart of unbelief, will endeavor to obtrude upon us a prudence so called, which is as opposite to the former as darkness to light. I do not say that, now you have a wife, and the prospect of a family, you are strictly bound to communicate with the poor in the same proportion as formerly. I say, you are not bound; for every thing of this sort should proceed from a willing mind. But if you should tell me, the Lord has given you such a zeal for his glory, such a concern for the honor of his gospel, such a love to his members, such a grateful sense of his mercies (especially by granting you, in the late instance of your marriage, the desire of you heart,) and such an affiance in his providence and promises, that you find yourself very unwilling to be one sixpence in the year less useful than you was before, I could not blame you, or dissuade you from it. But I do not absolutely advise it; because I know not the state of your mind, or what measure of faith the Lord has given you.

Only this I believe, that when the Lord gives such a confidence, he will not disappoint it.

When I look among the professors, yea, among the ministers of the gospel, there are few things I see a more general want of than such a trust in God as to temporals, and such a sense of the honor of being permitted to relieve the necessities of his people, as might dispose them to a more liberal distribution of what they have at present in their power, and to a reliance on him for a sufficient supply in future. Some exceptions there are. Some persons I have the happiness to know, whose chief pleasure it seems to be to devise liberal things. For the most part, we take care, first, to be well supplied, if possible, with all the necessities, conveniencies, and not a few of the elegancies of life; then to have a snug fund laid up against a rainy day, as the phrase is, (if this is in an increasing way, so much the better,) that when we look at children and near relatives, we may say to our hearts, "Now they are well provided for." And when we have gotten all this, and more, we are, perhaps, content, for the love of Christ, to bestow a pittance of our superfluities, a tenth or a twentieth part of what we spend or hoard up for ourselves, upon the poor. But, alas! what do we herein more than others? Multitudes, who know nothing of the love of Christ, will do thus much, yea, perhaps, greatly exceed us, from the mere feelings of humanity.

But it may be asked, Would you show no regard to the possibility of leaving your wife or children unprovided for? Quite the reverse. I would have you attend to it very much, and behold the Scriptures show you the more excellent way. If you had a little money to spare, would you not lend to me, if I assured you it should be repaid when wanted? I can point out to you better interest and better security than I could possibly give you, Prov. 19:17. "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." What think you of this text? Is it the word of God or not? Is he worthy of belief, or not? Is he able to make good his word, or is he not? I dare stake all my interest in your friendship, (which I should be very leath to forfeit,) that if you act upon this maxim, in a spirit of prayer and faith, and with a single eye to his glory, you shall not be disap-

pointed. Read over Matt. 6:26—34. Shall we confine that reasoning and those promises to the primitive times? Say not, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, this thing might be." He has more ways to bless and prosper those who trust in him, than we are able to point out to him. But I tell you, my friend, he will sooner make windows in heaven, turn stones into bread, yea, stop the sun in his course, than he will suffer those who conscientiously serve him, and depend upon him, to be destitute.

Some instances we have had of ministers who have seemed to transgress the bounds of strict prudence in their attention to the poor. But if they have been men of faith, prayer, and zeal; if they did it, not from a caprice of humor, or a spirit of indolence, but from such motives as the Scripture suggests and recommends, I believe their families have seldom suffered for it. I wish you to consult, upon this head, what Mrs. Alleine says, in the affecting account she has given of that honored and faithful servant of God, her husband, Joseph Alleine. Besides, you know not what you may actually save in a course of years by this method. The apostle, speaking of some abuses that obtained in the church of Corinth, says, "For this cause many are sick among you." If prudence should shut up the bowels of your compassion, (which I trust it never will,) the Lord might quarter an apothecary upon your family, which would, perhaps, cost you twice the money that would have sufficed to refresh his people, and to commend your ministry and character.

But if, after all, prudence will be heard, I counsel you to do these two things. First, Be very certain that you allow yourselves in nothing superfluous. You cannot, I trust, in conscience, think of laying out one penny more than is barely decent, unless you have another penny to help the poor. Then, secondly, Let your friends, who are in good circumstances, be plainly told, that, though you love them, prudence, and the necessary charge of a family, will not permit you to entertain them, no, not a night. What! say you, shut my door against my friends? Yes, by all means, rather than against Christ. If the Lord Jesus was again upon earth in a state of humiliation, and he, and the best friend you have, standing at your door, and your provision so strait that you could not receive both, which

would you entertain? Now, he says of the poor, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these, my brethren, you did it unto me." Your friends have houses of their own, and money to pay at an inn, if you do not take them in; but the poor need relief. One would almost think that passage, Luke 14:12,13,14. was not considered as a part of God's word; at least I believe there is no one passage so generally neglected by his own people. I do not think it unlawful to entertain our friends; but if these words do not teach us, that it is in some respects our duty to give a preference to the poor, I am at a loss to understand them.

I was enabled to set out upon the plan I recommend to you, at a time when my certain income was much too scanty for my own provision, and before I had the expectation or promise of assistance from any person upon earth. Only I knew that the Lord could provide me with whatever he saw needful; and I trusted, that if he kept me dependent upon himself, and desirous to live for his service only, he assuredly would do so. I have as yet seen no cause to repent it. I live upon his promise; for as to any present ways or means, every thing here below is so uncertain, that I consider myself in the same situation with the birds of the air, who have neither storehouse nor barn. To-day I have enough for myself, and something to impart to them that need; as to futurity, the Lord must provide; and, for the most part, I can believe he will. I can tell you, however, that now and then my heart is pinched; unbelief creeps in, and self would much rather choose a strong box, or what the world calls a certainty, than a life of absolute dependence upon the providence of God. However, in my composed hours, I am well satisfied. Hitherto he has graciously taken care of me; therefore may my heart trust in him, and be not afraid.

Consider, my friend, the Lord has done well for you likewise. He has settled you peaceably in a good and honorable interest; he has answered your prayers, in giving you a partner, with whom you may take sweet counsel, one that will help and strengthen you in your best desires. Beware, therefore, of that reasoning which might lead you to distrust the Lord your God, or to act as if you did. You complain that there is too much of an expensive taste among some persons in your congregation. If you set yourself to

discountenance this, and should at the same time too closely shut up your hands, they will be ready to charge you with being governed by the same worldly spirit, though in another form. If you have been hitherto tender and bountiful to the poor, and should make too great and too sudden an alteration in this respect, if the blame should not fall upon you, it probably would upon your wife, who, I believe, would be far from deserving it. If the house which had been open to the poor in former times should be shut against them now you live in it, would it not lead the people's thoughts back? Would it not open the mouths of those who do not love your ministry, to say, That, notwithstanding all your zeal about doctrines, you know how to take care of your own interest as well as those whom you have thought indifferent and lukewarm in the cause of the gospel? Would it not? But I forbear. I know you need no such arguments. Yet consider how many eyes are upon you, watching for your halting. Now, at your first setting out, is the proper time seriously to seek the Lord's direction, that you may, from the beginning, adopt such a plan as may be most for your own comfort, the honor of your character as a minister, the glory of him who has called you, and the edification of your people. It is easier to begin well, than to make alterations afterwards. I trust the Lord will guide and bless you in your deliberations. And, for my own part, I am not in the least afraid that you will ever have cause to blame me for the advice I have given, if you should be disposed to follow it.

I have given you my opinion freely, and perhaps with an appearance of more strictness than is necessary. But I would apply our Lord's words in another case to this: "All men cannot receive this saying; he that is able to receive it, let him receive it." If the Lord has given you confidence in his word, you are happy. It is better than the possession of thousands by the year.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

EXTRACT OF A LETTER TO A STUDENT IN DIVINITY.

DEAR SIR,

THE subject of your last is important. I can sympathize with your anxiety, having known much of it myself, and therefore willingly devote my first leisure to your service. But shall I indeed condole with you? or shall I rather congratulate you on the perplexity you complain of? I know it is not pleasing; but I hope it will be sanctified and profitable to you.

Though I am no enemy to the acquisition of useful knowledge, I have seen many instances of young men who have been much hurt by what they expected to reap advantage from. They have gone to the academy humble, peaceable, spiritual, and lively; but they have come out self-wise, dogmatical, censorious, and full of a prudence founded upon the false maxims of the world. I have been ready to address them with that line of Milton:

“ If thou art he—But ah! how fall’n!”

I do not mention this as the necessary fault of the institution, but as the frequent effect of notions too hastily picked up, when not sanctified by grace, nor balanced by a proportionable depth of spiritual experience. I am therefore glad to hear that, notwithstanding the advantages you have had in the pursuit of your studies, you feel an inward conviction that you still need something, which you cannot receive from men, or books, in order to complete your fitness for the ministry; that you may be “a workman that needs not to be ashamed,” and enabled rightly to divide (to distinguish and distribute) the word of truth.

It seems to me a point of more curiosity than use to inquire too nicely into the modus of the Holy Spirit’s assistance in the composure and delivery of sermons. If we cannot exactly state the boundaries between what we may deem the result of our own thoughts, and the needful influence of the Holy Spirit, it seems a safe way to give him the honor of the whole, and to attribute nothing to ourselves but our infirmities. If we have a capacity, means for improvement, diligence to make use of those means, and if that diligence is attended with any degree of success, may

we not acknowledge, that the former links of this chain are the effect of his goodness and favor, no less than the latter.

To the question, How far is it lawful to expect this assistance? I answer, It is lawful very far, even to lay the whole stress upon it, so as to be firmly persuaded that we can neither meditate nor speak to purpose without it; that if we have not this assistance, whatever else we have, or may think we have, we shall but "darken counsel by words without knowledge." For this, I think, I have warrant in John 15:5. If any person supposes he has so far mastered a system of divinity, that though he can indeed do better with the Spirit's assistance, yet he can make a tolerable shift without it, I envy him not this attainment.

But if the question intends, How far a dependence upon the Holy Spirit may lawfully supersede the use of means? I answer, Not in the least. The blessing and the means are so closely united, that they cannot be separated. The blessing may be surely expected, if diligently sought in the use of proper means; and we have no just reason to expect it without them. But to clear up the whole, let it be considered, What may deserve the name of diligence in this matter? and what are the proper means?

By diligence, I understand spiritual diligence; such an active, improving, industrious habit, as is peculiar to a heart impressed with some real, abiding sense of the love of God, the worth of souls, the shortness of time, and the importance of eternity. Without this turn of mind, though a man should spend sixteen hours every day in his study, he may be a mere trifler. The greatest part of his application will be spent on what is least necessary, and his knowledge will chiefly prove of that sort which puffeth up, without communicating any real benefit. Gen. 41: 21. Psal. 127: 2.

The chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are, the holy scriptures and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw. And I believe you will find, by observation, that the man who is most frequent and fervent in prayer, and most devoted to the word of God, will shine and flourish above his fellows. Next to these,

and derived from them, is meditation. By this I do not mean a stated exercise upon some one particular subject, so much as a disposition of mind to observe carefully what passes within us and around us; what we see, hear, and feel; and to apply all for the illustration and confirmation of the written word to us. In the use of these means, and humble dependence upon the Lord in all the changing dispensations we pass through, our spiritual experience will enlarge; and this experience is the proper fund of ministerial capacity, so far as it may be considered inherent in us. Prov. 16:23. Mat. 13:52. 1 John 1:3.

These means are of universal importance. The wisest can do nothing without them; the weakest shall not use them in vain. There are likewise subordinate means, which may be helpful, and should in general be attended to. Yet they ought not, I apprehend, to be considered as a *sine qua non* in a minister's call and fitness. The first preachers had them not, and some in the present day are enabled to do well without them. Under this head, I principally intend all that comes under the usual denomination of literature. A competent acquaintance with the learned languages, history, natural philosophy, &c. is very desirable. If these things are held in a proper subserviency, if they do not engross too much of our time, nor add fuel to the fire of that self-importance which is our great snare, they may contribute to increase and enlarge our ideas, and facilitate our expressing ourselves with propriety. But these attainments, like riches, are attended with their peculiar temptations; and unless they are under the regulation of a sound judgment, and spiritual frame of mind, will prove, like Saul's armor to David, rather cumbersome than useful in preaching. The sermons of preachers thus qualified are often more ingenious than edifying, and rather set off the man, than commend the gospel of Christ.

As you desire my advice with respect to your future studies, I shall comply, without hesitation or ceremony.

The original scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them. There is, doubtless, a beauty, fullness, and spirit, in the originals, which the best translations do not always express. When a word or a phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve one; and it is not to be supposed, unless they were per-

fectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit, that they would always prefer the best. Only be upon your guard, lest you should be tempted to think, that because you are master of the grammatical construction, and can tell the several acceptations of the words in the best authors, you are therefore and thereby master of the spiritual sense likewise. This you must derive from your experimental knowledge, and the influence and teaching of the Spirit of God.

Another thing which will assist you in composing, and speaking properly and acceptably, is logic. This will teach you what properly belongs to your subject, and what may be best suppressed; and likewise to explain, divide, enumerate, and range your ideas to advantage. A lax, immethodical, disproportionate manner is to be avoided; yet beware of the contrary extreme. An affected starchiness and over-accuracy will fetter you, will make your discourse lean and dry, preclude an useful variety, and savor more of the school-lamp, than of that heavenly fire, which alone can make our meditations efficacious, and profitable either to ourselves or our hearers. The proper medium can hardly be taught by rule; experience, observation, and prayer, are the best guides.

As your inquiry seems chiefly to be, How to fill up your outlines? I would advise you to study the living, as well as the dead, or rather more. Converse much with experienced christians, and exercised souls. You will find advantage in this respect, not only from the wise, but from the weak of the flock. In the course of your acquaintance, you will meet with some in a backsliding state, some under temptations, some walking in darkness, others rejoicing in the light, &c. Observe how their spirits work, what they say, and how they reason in their several cases; what methods and arguments you find most successful in comforting the feeble-minded, raising up those who are cast down, and the like; and what answers they return. Compare these with the word of God, and your own heart. What you observe of ten persons in these different situations, may be applied to ten thousand. For though some circumstances vary, the heart of man, the aids of grace, and the artifices of Satan, in general, are universally the same. And whenever you are to preach, remember that

some of these sorts will probably be before you, and each should have something said to their own peculiar case.

The tempted and distressed will be most probably relieved, by opening the various states and exercises of the heart, and by showing, from scriptural and other examples, that no new thing has befallen them. The careless and backsliders, who have made a profession, should be reminded of that blessedness they once spoke of, and warned of their danger. Those who are now upon the mount should be cautioned to expect a change, and to guard against security and spiritual pride. To the dead in trespasses and sins, (some such will be always present,) it is needful to preach the spirituality and sanction of the law, that they may be stirred up to seek Jesus. Of him all awakened souls love to hear much. Let him, therefore, be your capital subject. If you discuss some less essential topic, or bend all your strength to clear up some dark text, though you should display much learning and ingenuity, you will probably fall short of your main design, which, I dare say, will be to promote the glory of God, and the good of souls.

You will likewise find advantage, by attending as much as you can on those preachers, whom God has blessed with much power, life, and success in their ministry; and in this you will do well not to confine yourself to any denomination or party; for the Spirit of the Lord is not confined. Different men have different gifts and talents. I would not wish you to be a slavish admirer of any man. Christ alone is our Master and Teacher. But study the excellencies of each; and if you observe a fault in any, (for no human models are perfect,) you will see what you are yourself to avoid.

Your inquiries respecting my own experience on this subject, must be answered very briefly. I have long since learned, that if I was ever to be a minister, faith and prayer must make me one. I desire to seek the Lord's direction, both in the choice and management of subjects; but I do not expect it in a way of extraordinary impulse, but in endeavoring to avail myself, to the best of my judgment, of present circumstances. The converse I have with my people usually suggests what I am to preach to

them. At first, my chief solicitude used to be, what I should find to say; I hope it is now, rather that I may not speak in vain. For the Lord has sent me here, not to acquire the character of a ready speaker, but to win souls to Christ, and to edify his people. As to preparation, I make little use of books, excepting the Bible and Concordance. Though I preach without notes, I must frequently write more or less upon the subject. Often, when I begin, I am at a loss how I shall proceed; but one thing insensibly offers after another, and, in general, I believe, the best and most useful parts of my sermon occur *de novo*, while I am preaching. This reminds me of Luther's maxim, "*Bene precasse est bene studuisse.*" When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, every thing else is comparatively easy.

I should be very glad if any thing I have offered may afford you satisfaction. The sum of my advice is this: Examine your heart and views. Can you appeal to him who knows all things concerning the sincerity of your aim, that you devote yourself to the work of the ministry, not for worldly regards, but with an humble desire to promote the Redeemer's kingdom. If so, and his providence has thus far concurred with you, trust him for your sufficiency of every kind, and he will not disappoint you, but will be near to strengthen you according to your day. Depend not upon any cisterns you can hew out for yourself, but rejoice that you have liberty to come to the fountain that is always full, and always flowing. You must not expect a mechanical sufficiency, such as artificers acquire by habit and exercise in their business. When you have preached well nineteen times, this will be no security for the twentieth. Yea, when you have been upheld for twenty years, should the Lord withhold his hand, you would be as much at a loss as at first.

If you lean upon books or men, or upon your own faculties and attainments, you will be in fear and in danger of falling continually. But if you stay yourself upon the Lord, he will not only make good your expectations, but in time will give you a becoming confidence in his goodness, and free you from your present anxiety.

One thing more I must mention as belonging to the subject: That a comfortable freedom for public service

depends much upon the spirituality of our walk before God and man. Wisdom will not dwell with a trifling, an assuming, a censorious, or a worldly spirit. But if it is our business, and our pleasure, to contemplate Jesus, and to walk in his steps, he will bless us; we shall be like trees planted by a constant stream, and he will prosper the work of our hands.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND, ON THE QUESTION, WHETHER THE SINS OF BELIEVERS SHALL BE PUBLICLY DECLARED AT THE GREAT DAY? OR, HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THE APOSTLE'S ASSERTION, "WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT-SEAT OF CHRIST; THAT EVERY ONE MAY RECEIVE THE THINGS DONE IN HIS BODY, ACCORDING TO THAT HE HATH DONE, WHETHER IT BE GOOD OR BAD?" 2 COR. 5: 10. COMPARED WITH ROM. 14: 12.

MY DEAR SIR,

My heart congratulates you. What changes and events many, in younger life, may be reserved to see, who can tell? But your pilgrimage is nearly finished; you stand upon the river's brink, with the city full in view, waiting and wishing for the appointed hour. You need not be anxious concerning your passage; for every circumstance attending it is already adjusted by infinite wisdom and love, and the King himself will be ready to receive you. While you continue here, I am glad to hear from you, and should be glad to contribute in any way or degree to your satisfaction, or even to show my willingness, if I can do no more. I can propose little more than the latter, by offering my thoughts on the subject you propose from 2 Cor. 5: 10. and the apparent difficulty of understanding that passage, in full harmony with the many texts which seem expressly to assert, that the sins of believers are so forgiven as to be remembered no more.

There is doubtless, as you observe, a perfect consistence

in every part of the word of God; the difficulties we meet with are wholly owing to the narrowness of our faculties, and the ignorance which, in some degree, is inseparable from our present state of imperfection. And we may, in general, rest satisfied with the thought, that there is a bright moment approaching, when the veil shall be wholly taken away. It is the part of faith to rest upon the plain declarations of scripture, without indulging a vain curiosity of knowing more than is clearly revealed; yet, while we humbly depend upon divine teaching, it is right to aim at as enlarged a sense of what is revealed as we can attain to. Every acquisition of this kind is more valuable than gold; especially respecting those points which have an immediate tendency to comfort and support us under the view of an approaching dissolution. The question you have proposed is undoubtedly of this nature.

May the Lord direct my thoughts and pen, that I may not "darken counsel by words without knowledge!" I have been looking over the passage you refer to in Dr. Ridgley, and think I might be well excused from saying any thing further on the subject, as he hath briefly and fully stated all the arguments that have occurred to me on either side of the question, and closes with a proper caution not to be peremptory in determining, lest by attempting to be wise above what is written, I should betray my own folly. Yet, as you desire to have my thoughts, I must say something. I wish I may not give you reason to think that this caution has been lost upon me.

I think all the great truths in which we are concerned, are clearly, and expressly laid down, not only in one, but in many places of scripture; but it sometimes happens, that here and there we meet with a text, which, in the first and obvious sound of the words seems to speak differently from what is asserted more largely elsewhere; which texts, singly taken, afford some men their only ground for the hypothesis they maintain. Thus the Arians lay a great stress on John 14: 28. and the Arminians on James 2: 24. &c. But their true interpretation is to be sought according to the analogy of faith. They are capable of a sense agreeable to the others, though the others are not intelligible in the sense they would fix upon these. In like manner, I would say whatever may be the precise meaning of 2 Cor. 5: 10. we

are sure it cannot be designed to weaken what we are taught in almost every page, of the free, absolute, and unalterable nature of a believer's justification; the benefit of which, as to the forgiveness of sin, is signified by the phrases of "blotting out,"—"not remembering,"—"casting behind the back,"—and "into the depths of the sea." The sins of a believer are so effectually removed, that even when, or if they are sought for, they cannot be found; for Jesus has borne them away: believers are complete in him, and clothed in his righteousness. They shall stand before God without spot or wrinkle. Who shall lay any thing to their charge?

But it is probable that those stray expressions chiefly, if not entirely, respect the guilt, imputation, and deserved consequences of sin. None can suppose that the Lord will, or can forget the sins of his people, or that they can ever be hid from his all-comprehending view. Neither can I think they themselves will forget them. Their song is founded upon a recollection of their sins and their circumstances in this life, Rev. 5:9.; and their love, and consequently their happiness, seems inseparably connected with the consciousness of what they were, and what they had done, Luke 7:47. And I think those are the sweetest moments in this life, when we have the clearest sense of our own sins, provided the sense of our acceptance in the Beloved is proportionably clear, and we feel the consolations of his love, notwithstanding all our transgressions. When we arrive in glory, unbelief and fear will cease for ever: our nearness to God, and communion with him, will be unspeakable beyond what we can now conceive. Therefore, the remembrance of our sins will be no abatement of our bliss, but rather the contrary. When Pharaoh and his host were alive, and pursuing them, the Israelites were terrified; but afterwards, when they saw their enemies dead upon the shore, their joy and triumph were not abated, but heightened, by the consideration of their number.

With respect to our sins being made known to others, I acknowledge with you, that I could not now bear to have any of my fellow-creatures made acquainted with what passes in my heart for a single day; but I apprehend it is a part, and a proof of my present depravity, that I feel myself disposed to pay so great a regard to the judgment of

men, while I am so little affected with what I am in the sight of a pure and holy God. But I believe that hereafter, when self shall be entirely rooted out, and my will perfectly united to the divine will, I should feel no reluctance, supposing it for the manifestation of his glorious grace, that men, angels, and devils, should know the very worst of me. Whether it will be so or no, I dare not determine. Perhaps the difficulty chiefly lies in the necessity of our being at present taught heavenly things by earthly. In the descriptions we have of the great day, allusion is made to what is most solemn in human transactions. The ideas of the judgment-seat, the great trumpet, of the books being opened, and the pleadings, Matth. 25:37—44. seem to be borrowed from the customs that obtain amongst men, to help our weak conceptions, rather than justly and fully to describe what will be the real process. Now, when we attempt to look into the unseen world, we carry our ideas of time and place, and sensible objects, along with us; and we cannot divest ourselves of them, or provide ourselves with better: yet, perhaps, they have as little relation to the objects we aim at, as the ideas which a man born blind acquires from what he hears and feels, have to the true nature of light and colors. Mr. Locke mentions one, who, after much thought and conversation, supposed he had got a tolerable notion of scarlet, and that it was something nearly resembling the sound of a trumpet. Perhaps this is no improper emblem of the utmost we can attain to, when we are endeavoring to realize the solemnities of the judgment-day. What we mean by memory and reasoning, may possibly have no place in the world of spirits. We guess at something more suitable, perhaps, when we use the term intuition. But I apprehend we must die before we can fully understand what it signifies: perhaps thoughts may be as intelligible there as words are here.

In a word, my dear sir, if I have not given you satisfaction, (I am sure I have not satisfied myself,) accept my apology in the words of a much wiser, and an inspired man: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it." Ere long we shall know: in the mean while our cause is in sure hands; we have a Shepherd who will guide us below; an Advocate who will receive and present us before the throne above. I trust we meet daily be-

fore the throne of grace: hereafter we shall meet in glory. The paper will allow no more. Believe me yours in the Lord, &c.

LETTER IV.

TO THERON, ON FAMILY WORSHIP.

SIR,

A NEGLECT of family-prayer is, I am afraid, too common amongst professors in this day. I am glad that you consider it both as a duty and a privilege, and are by grace determined, that when you shall commence master of a family, you will worship God with all your house. It was Abraham's commendation, that he not only served the Lord himself, but was solicitous that his children and household might serve him likewise. I trust that he who inclines your heart to walk in the footsteps of faithful Abraham will bless you in the attempt, and give you peace in your dwelling; a mercy which is seldom enjoyed; which, indeed, can hardly be expected, by those families which call not upon the Lord.

Though I readily comply with your request, and should be glad if I can offer any thing which may assist or animate you in your good purpose, I am afraid I shall not answer your expectations with regard to the particulars of your inquiry concerning the most proper method of conducting family-worship. The circumstances of families are so various, that no determinate rules can be laid down, nor has the word of God prescribed any; because, being of universal obligation, it is wisely and graciously accommodated to suit the different situations of his people. You must, therefore, as to circumstantialia, judge for yourself. You will do well to pursue such a method as you shall find most convenient to yourself and family, without scrupulously binding yourself, when the Scripture has left you free.

We have no positive precept enjoining us any set time for prayer, nor even how often we should pray, either in public or private; though the expressions of, "continuing instant in prayer," "praying without ceasing," and the like,

plainly intimate that prayer should be frequent. Daniel prayed three times a-day; which the psalmist speaks of as his practice likewise; and in one place declares his purpose of praising God seven times a-day. This last expression is, perhaps, indefinite; not precisely seven times, but very often. Indeed, a person who lives in the exercise of faith and love, and who finds, by experience, that it is good for him to draw nigh to God, will not want to be told how often he must pray, any more than how often he must converse with an earthly friend. Those whom we love, we love to be much with. Love is the best casuist, and either resolves or prevents a thousand scruples and questions, which may perplex those who only serve God from principles of constraint and fear. And a believer will account those his happiest days, when he has most leisure, and most liberty of spirit, for the exercise of prayer. However, I think family-prayer cannot be said to be stated, unless it be performed at least daily, and, when unavoidable hindrances do not prevent, twice a-day. Though all times and seasons are alike to the Lord, and his ear is always open, whenever we have a heart to call upon him, yet to us there is a peculiar suitableness in beginning and closing the day with prayer: in the morning, to acknowledge his goodness in our preservation through the night, and entreat his presence and blessing on our persons and callings in the course of the day; and at night, to praise him for the mercies of the day past, to humble ourselves before him for what has been amiss, to wait on him for a renewed manifestation of his pardoning love, and to commit ourselves and our concerns to his care and protection while we sleep. You will of course choose those hours when you are least liable to be incommoded by the calls of business, and when the family can assemble with the most convenience; only I would observe, that it greatly preserves regularity and good order in a house to keep constantly to the same hours, when it is practicable; and likewise, that it is best not to defer evening-prayer till late, if it can be well avoided, lest some who join in the exercise, and perhaps the person himself who leads in it, should be too weary or sleepy to give a due attention. On this account, I should advise to have family-prayer before supper, where people have the choice and disposal of their own hours.

I think, with you, that it is very expedient and proper that reading a portion of the word of God should be ordinarily a part of our family-worship; so likewise, to sing a hymn or psalm, or part of one, at discretion, provided there are some persons in the family who have enough of a musical ear and voice to conduct the singing in a tolerable manner; otherwise, perhaps, it may be better omitted. If you read and sing, as well as pray, care should be taken that the combined services do not run into an inconvenient length.

The chief thing to be attended to is, that it may be a spiritual service; and the great evil to be dreaded and guarded against in the exercise of every duty that returns frequently upon us, is formality. If a stated course of family-prayer is kept up as constantly in its season as the striking of the clock, it may come in time to be almost as mechanically performed, unless we are continually looking to the Lord to keep our hearts alive. It most frequently happens that one or more members of a family are unconverted persons. When there are such present, a great regard should be had to them, and every thing conducted with a view to their edification, that they may not be disgusted, or wearied, or tempted to think that it is little more than the fashion or custom of the house; which will probably be the case, unless the master of the family is lively and earnest in the performance of the duty, and likewise circumspect and consistent in every part of his behavior at other times. By leading in the worship of God before children, servants, or strangers, a man gives bond, as it were, for his behavior, and adds strength to every other motive which should engage him to abstain from all appearance of evil. It should be a constant check upon our language and tempers in the presence of our families, to consider that we began the day, and propose to end it, with them in prayer. The Apostle Peter uses this argument to influence the conduct of husbands and wives towards each other; and it is equally applicable to all the members of a family; "That your prayers be not hindered;" that is, either prevented and cut off, or despoiled of all life and efficacy, by the ferment of sinful passions. On the other hand, the proper exercise of family-prayer, when recommended by a suitable deportment, is a happy means of instructing children and servants

in the great truths of religion, of softening their prejudices, and inspiring them with a temper of respect and affection, which will dispose them to cheerful obedience, and make them unwilling to grieve or offend. In this instance, as in every other, we may observe, that the Lord's commands to his people are not arbitrary appointments, but that, so far as they are conscientiously complied with, they have an evident tendency and suitableness to promote our own advantage. He requires us to acknowledge him in our families, for our own sakes; not because he has need of our poor services, but because we have need of his blessing, and without the influence of his grace (which is promised to all who seek it) are sure to be unhappy in ourselves, and in all our connexions.

When husband and wife are happily partakers of the same faith, it seems expedient, and for their mutual good, that besides their private devotions, and joining in family-prayer, they should pray together. They have many wants, mercies, and concerns, in common with each other, and distinct from the rest of the family. The manner in which they should improve a little time in this joint exercise cannot well be prescribed by a third person; yet I will venture to suggest one thing; and the rather, as I do not remember to have met with it in print. I conceive that it may prove much to their comfort to pray alternately; not only the husband with and for the wife, but the wife with and for the husband. The Spirit of God, by the apostle, has expressly restrained women from the exercise of spiritual gifts in public, but I apprehend the practice I am speaking of can no way interfere with that restriction. I suppose them in private together, and then I judge it to be equally right and proper for either of them to pray with the other. Nor do I meet with any thing in St. Paul's writings to prevent my thinking, that if he had been a married man, he would, though an apostle, have been glad of the prayers of his wife. If you ask, how often they should pray together? I think the oftener the better, provided it does not break in upon their duties; once a-day at least; and if there is a choice of hours, it might be as well at some distance from their other seasons of worship. But I would observe, as before, that in matters not expressly commanded, prudence and experience must direct.

I have written upon the supposition that you use extempore prayer; but as there are many heads of families who fear the Lord, and have not yet attained liberty to pray extempore before others, I would add, that their inability in this respect, whether real, or whether only proceeding from fear, and an undue regard to self, will not justify them in the omission of family-prayer. Helps may be procured. Mr. Jenk's Devotions are in many hands, and I doubt not but there are other excellent books of the same kind, with which I am not acquainted. If they begin with a form, not with a design to confine themselves always to one, but make it a part of their secret pleading at the throne of grace, that they may be favored with the gift and spirit of prayer, and accustom themselves, while they use a form, to interperse some petitions of their own, there is little doubt but they will in time find a growth in liberty and ability, and at length lay their book entirely aside. For it being every believer's duty to worship God in his family, his promise may be depended upon, to give them a sufficiency in all things for those services which he requires of them.

Happy is that family where the worship of God is constantly and conscientiously maintained. Such houses are temples, in which the Lord dwells, and castles garrisoned by a divine power. I do not say, that, by honoring God in your house, you will wholly escape a share in the trials incident to the present uncertain state of things. A measure of such trials will be necessary for the exercise and manifestation of your graces, to give you a more convincing proof of the truth and sweetness of the promises made to a time of affliction, to mortify the body of sin, and to wean you more effectually from the world. But this I will confidently say, that the Lord will both honor and comfort those who thus honor him. Seasons will occur in which you shall know, and probably your neighbors shall be constrained to take notice, that he has not bid you seek him in vain. If you meet with troubles, they shall be accompanied by supports, and followed by deliverance; and you shall, upon many occasions, experience that he is your protector, preserving you and yours from the evils by which you will see others suffering around you.

I have rather exceeded the limits I proposed, and there-

fore shall only add a request, that in your addresses at the throne of grace you will remember, &c.

LETTER V.

ON THE SNARES AND DIFFICULTIES ATTENDING THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL.

DEAR SIR,

I AM glad to hear that you are ordained, and that the Lord is about to fix you in a place where there is a prospect of your being greatly useful. He has given you the desire of your heart; and I hope he has given you likewise a heart to devote yourself, without reserve, to his service, and the service of souls for his sake. I willingly comply with your request; and shall without ceremony offer you such thoughts as occur to me upon this occasion.

You have, doubtless, often anticipated in your mind the nature of the service to which you are now called, and made it the subject of much consideration and prayer. But a distant view of the ministry is generally very different from what it is found to be when we are actually engaged in it. The young soldier, who has never seen an enemy, may form some general notions of what is before him; but his ideas will be much more lively and diversified when he comes upon the field of battle. If the Lord was to show us the whole before hand, who, that has a due sense of his own insufficiency and weakness, would venture to engage? But he first draws us by a constraining sense of his love, and by giving us an impression of the worth of souls, and leaves us to acquire a knowledge of what is difficult and disagreeable by a gradual experience. The ministry of the gospel, like the book which the apostle John ate, is a bitter sweet; but the sweetness is tasted first; the bitterness is usually known afterwards, when we are so far engaged that there is no going back.

Yet I would not discourage you; it is a good and noble cause, and we serve a good and gracious Master; who, though he will make us feel our weakness and vileness, will not suffer us to sink under it. His grace is sufficient

for us; and if he favors us with an humble and dependant spirit, a single eye, and a simple heart, he will make every difficulty give way, and mountains will sink into plains before his power.

You have known something of Satan's devices while you were in private life; how he has envied your privileges, assaulted your peace, and laid snares for your feet: though the Lord would not suffer him to hurt you, he has permitted him to sift and tempt, and shoot his fiery arrows at you. Without some of this discipline, you would have been very unfit for that part of your office which consists in speaking a word in season to weary and heavy-laden souls. But you may now expect to hear from him, and to be beset by his power and subtilty in a different manner. You are now to be placed in the forefront of the battle, and to stand, as it were, for his mark: so far as he can prevail against you now, not yourself only, but many others, will be affected: many eyes will be upon you; and if you take a wrong step, or are ensnared into a wrong spirit, you will open the mouths of the adversaries wider, and grieve the hearts of believers more sensibly, than if the same things had happened to you while you were a layman. The work of the ministry is truly honorable; but, like the post of honor in a battle, it is attended with peculiar dangers; therefore the apostle cautions Timothy, "Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine." To thyself in the first place, and then to thy doctrine; the latter without the former would be impracticable and vain.

You have need to be upon your guard in whatever way your first attempts to preach the gospel may seem to operate. If you should (as may probably be the case, where the truth has been little known,) meet with much opposition, you will perhaps find it a heavier trial than you are aware of; but I speak of it only as it might draw forth your corruptions, and give Satan advantage against you; and this may be two ways: first, by embittering your spirit against opposers, so as to speak in anger, to set them at defiance, or retaliate upon them in their own way; which, besides bringing guilt upon your conscience, would of course increase your difficulties, and impede your usefulness. A violent opposition against ministers and professors of the gospel is sometimes expressed by the devil's roaring; and

some people think no good can be done without it. It is allowed, that men who love darkness will show their dislike of the light; but, I believe, if the wisdom and meekness of the friends of the gospel had been always equal to their good intentions and zeal, the devil would not have had opportunity of rearing so loud as he has sometimes done. The subject-matter of the gospel is offence enough to the carnal heart; we must therefore expect opposition; but we should not provoke or despise it, or do any thing to aggravate it. A patient continuance in well-doing, a consistency in character, and an attention to return kind offices for hard treatment, will, in course of time, greatly soften the spirit of opposition; and instances are to be found of ministers who are treated with some respect, even by those persons in their parishes who are most averse to their doctrine. When the apostle directs us, "If it be possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men," he seems to intimate, that though it be difficult, it is not wholly impracticable. We cannot change the rooted prejudices of their hearts against the gospel; but it is possible, by the Lord's blessing, to stop their mouths, and make them ashamed of discovering it, when they behold our good conversation in Christ. And it is well worth our while to cultivate this outward peace, provided we do not purchase it at the expense of truth and faithfulness; for ordinarily we cannot hope to be useful to our people, unless we give them reason to believe that we love them, and have their interest at heart. Again, opposition will hurt you, if it should give you an idea of your own importance, and lead you to dwell with a secret self-approbation upon your own faithfulness and courage in such circumstances. If you are able to stand your ground uninfluenced either by the favor or fear of men, you have reason to give glory to God; but remember, that you cannot thus stand an hour, unless he upholds you. It shows a wrong turn of mind, when we are very ready to speak of our trials and difficulties of this kind, and of our address and resolution in encountering them. A natural stiffness of spirit, with a desire to have self taken notice of, may make a man willing to endure those kind of hardships, though he has but little grace in exercise; but true christian fortitude, from a consciousness that we speak the truths

of God, and are supported by his power, is a very different thing.

If you should meet with but little opposition, or if the Lord should be pleased to make your enemies your friends, you will probably be in danger from the opposite quarter. If opposition has hurt many, popularity has wounded more. To say the truth, I am in some pain for you. Your natural abilities are considerable; you have been diligent in your studies; your zeal is warm, and your spirit is lively. With these advantages, I expect to see you a popular preacher. The more you are so, the greater will your field of usefulness be: but, alas! you cannot yet know to what it will expose you. It is like walking upon ice. When you shall see an attentive congregation hanging upon your words; when you shall hear the well-meant, but often injudicious, commendations of those to whom the Lord shall make you useful; when you shall find, upon an intimation of your preaching in a strange place, people thronging from all parts to hear you, how will your heart feel? It is easy for me to advise you to be humble, and for you to acknowledge the propriety of the advice; but while human nature remains in its present state, there will be almost the same connexion between popularity and pride, as between fire and gunpowder; they cannot meet without an explosion, at least, not unless the gunpowder is kept very damp. So unless the Lord is constantly moistening our hearts (if I may so speak) by the influences of his Spirit, popularity will soon set us in a blaze. You will hardly find a person who has been exposed to this fiery trial without suffering loss. Those whom the Lord loves, he is able to keep, and he will keep them, upon the whole; yet by such means, and in a course of such narrow escapes, that they shall have reason to look upon their deliverance as no less than miraculous. Sometimes, if his ministers are not watchful against the first impressions of pride, he permits it to gather strength; and then it is but a small thing, that a few of their admirers may think them more than men in the pulpit, if they are left to commit such mistakes when out of it, as the weakest of the flock can discover and pity. And this will certainly be the case, while pride and self-sufficiency have the ascendant. Beware, my friend, of mistaking the ready exercise of gifts

for the exercise of grace. The minister may be assisted in public for the sake of his hearers; and there is something in the nature of our public work, when surrounded by a concourse of people, that is suited to draw forth the exertion of our abilities, and to engage our attention in the outward services, when the frame of the heart may be far from being right in the service of the Lord. When Moses smote the rock, the water followed; yet he spoke unadvisedly with his lips, and greatly displeased the Lord. However, the congregation was not disappointed for his fault, nor was he put to shame before them; but he was humbled for it afterwards. They are happy whom the Lord preserves in some degree humble, without leaving them to expose themselves to the observation of men, and to receive such wounds as are seldom healed without leaving a deep scar. But even these have much to suffer. Many distressing exercises you will probably meet with, upon the best supposition, to preserve in you a due sense of your own unworthiness, and to convince you, that your ability, your acceptance, and your usefulness, depend upon a power beyond your own. Sometimes, perhaps, you will feel such an amazing difference between the frame of your spirit in public and in private, when the eyes of men are not upon you, as will make you almost ready to conclude that you are no better than a hypocrite, a mere stage-player, who derives all his pathos and exertion from the sight of the audience. At other times, you will find such a total emptiness and indisposition of mind, that former seasons of liberty in preaching will appear to you like the remembrance of a dream, and you will hardly be able to persuade yourself you shall ever be capable of preaching again; the Scriptures will appear to you like a sealed book, and no text or subject afford any light or opening to determine your choice; and this perplexity may not only seize you in the study, but accompany you to the pulpit. If you are enabled at some times to speak to the people with power, and to resemble Samson, when, in the greatness of his strength, he bore away the gates of the city, you will, perhaps, at others, appear before them like Samson when his locks were shorn, and he stood in fetters. So that you need not tell the people you have no sufficiency in yourself; for they will readily perceive it without your information.

These things are hard to bear; yet successful popularity is not to be preserved upon easier terms; and if they are but sanctified to hide pride from you, you will have reason to number them amongst your choicest mercies.

I have but just made an entrance upon the subject of the difficulties and dangers attending the ministry. But my paper is full. If you are willing I should proceed, let me know, and I believe I can easily find enough to fill another sheet. May the Lord make you wise and watchful! That he may be the light of your eye, the strength of your arm, and the joy of your heart, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER VI.

ON THE PRACTICAL INFLUENCE OF FAITH.

SIR,

THE use and importance of faith, as it respects a sinner's justification before God, has been largely insisted on; but it is likewise of great use and importance in the daily concerns of life. It gives evidence and subsistence to things not seen, and realizes the great truths of the gospel, so as that they become abiding and living principles of support and direction, while we are passing through this wilderness. Thus, it is as the eye and the hand, without which we cannot take one step with certainty, or attempt any service with success. It is to be wished that this practical exercise of faith were duly attended to by all professors. We should not then meet with so many cases that put us to a stand, and leave us at a great difficulty to reconcile what we see in some, of whom we would willingly hope well, with what we read in Scripture, of the inseparable concomitants of a true and lively faith. For how can we but be staggered, when we hear persons speaking the language of assurance, that they know their acceptance with God through Christ, and have not the least doubt of their interest in all the promises; while, at the same time, we see them under the influence of unsanctified tempers, of a proud, passionate, positive, worldly, selfish, or churlish carriage?

It is not only plain from the general tenor of Scripture,

that a covetous, a proud, or a censorious spirit, are no more consistent with the spirit of the gospel, than drunkenness or whoredom; but there are many express texts directly pointed against the evils which too often are found amongst professors. Thus the apostle James assures us, "That if any man seemeth to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, his religion is vain;" and the apostle John, "That if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him;" and he seems to apply this character to any man, whatever his profession or pretences may be, "who, having this world's goods, and seeing his brother have need, shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him." Surely these texts more than intimate, that the faith which justifies the soul, does likewise receive from Jesus grace for grace, whereby the heart is purified, and the conversation regulated as becomes the gospel of Christ.

There are too many who would have the ministry of the gospel restrained to the privileges of believers; and when the fruits of faith, and the tempers of the mind, which should be manifest in those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious," are inculcated, think they sufficiently evade all that is said, by calling it legal preaching. I would be no advocate for legal preaching; but we must not be deterred, by the fear of a hard word, from declaring the whole counsel of God; and we have the authority and example of St. Paul, who was a champion of the doctrines of free grace, to animate us in exhorting professors to "walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory." And indeed the expression of a believer's privilege is often misunderstood. It is a believer's privilege to walk with God in the exercise of faith, and, by the power of his Spirit, to mortify the whole body of sin; to gain a growing victory over the world and self, and to make daily advances in conformity to the mind that was in Christ. And nothing that we profess to know, believe, or hope for, deserves the name of a privilege, farther than we are influenced by it to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness. Whosoever is possessed of true faith, will not confine his inquiries to the single point of his acceptance with God, or be satisfied with the distant hope of heaven hereafter. He will likewise be solicitous how he may glorify God in the

world, and enjoy such foretastes of heaven as are attainable while he is yet upon earth.

Faith then, in its practical exercise, has for its object the whole word of God, and forms its estimate of all things with which the soul is at present concerned, according to the standard of Scripture. Like Moses, it "endures, as seeing him who is invisible." When our Lord was upon earth, and conversed with his disciples, their eyes and hearts were fixed upon him. In danger he was their defender; their guide when in perplexity; and to him they looked for the solution of all their doubts, and the supply of all their wants. He is now withdrawn from our eyes; but faith sets him still before us for the same purposes, and, according to its degree, with the same effects, as if we actually saw him. His spiritual presence, apprehended by faith, is a restraint from evil, an encouragement to every service, and affords a present refuge and help in every time of trouble. To this is owing the delight a believer takes in ordinances, because there he meets his Lord; and to this likewise it is owing, that his religion is not confined to public occasions; but he is the same person in secret as he appears to be in the public assembly; for he worships him who sees in secret, and dares appeal to his all-seeing eye for the sincerity of his desires and intentions. By faith he is enabled to use prosperity with moderation; and knows and feels that what the world calls good is of small value, unless it is accompanied with the presence and blessing of Him whom his soul loveth. And his faith upholds him under all trials, by assuring him that every dispensation is under the direction of his Lord; that chastisements are a token of his love; that the season, measure, and continuance of his sufferings, are appointed by infinite wisdom, and designed to work for his everlasting good; and that grace and strength shall be afforded him, according to his day. Thus, his heart being fixed, trusting in the Lord, to whom he has committed all his concerns, and knowing that his best interests are safe, he is not greatly afraid of evil tidings, but enjoys a stable peace in the midst of a changing world. For though he cannot tell what a day may bring forth, he believes that He, who has invited and enabled him to cast all his cares upon him, will suffer nothing to befall him but what shall be

made subservient to his chief desires, the glory of God, in the sanctification and final salvation of his soul. And if, through the weakness of his flesh, he is liable to be startled by the first impression of a sharp and sudden trial, he quickly flees to his strong refuge, remembers it is the Lord's doing, resigns himself to his will, and patiently expects a happy issue.

By the same principle of faith a believer's conduct is regulated towards his fellow-creatures; and in the discharge of the several duties and relations of life, his great aim is to please God, and to let his light shine in the world. He believes and feels his own weakness and unworthiness, and lives upon the grace and pardoning love of his Lord. This gives him an habitual tenderness and gentleness of spirit. Humbled under a sense of much forgiveness to himself, he finds it easy to forgive others, if he has aught against any. A due sense of what he is in the sight of the Lord, preserves him from giving way to anger, positiveness, and resentment. He is not easily provoked, but is "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;" and if offended, easy to be entreated, and disposed not only to yield to a reconciliation, but to seek it. As Jesus is his life, and righteousness, and strength, so he is his pattern. By faith he contemplates and studies this great exemplar of philanthropy. With a holy ambition he treads in the footsteps of his Lord and Master, and learns of him to be meek and lowly, to requite injuries with kindness, and to overcome evil with good. From the same views, by faith he derives a benevolent spirit, and, according to his sphere and ability, he endeavors to promote the welfare of all around him. The law of love being thus written in his heart, and his soul set at liberty from the low and narrow dictates of a selfish spirit, his language will be truth, and his dealings equity. His promise may be depended on, without the interposition of an oath, bond, or witness; and the feelings of his own heart, under the direction of an enlightened conscience, and the precepts of Scripture, prompt him to do unto others as he would desire they, in the like circumstances, should do unto him. If he is a master, he is gentle and compassionate; if a servant, he is faithful and obedient; for in either relation he acts by faith, under the eye of his Master in heaven. If he is a trader, he neither

dares nor wishes to take advantage either of the ignorance or the necessities of those with whom he deals. And the same principle of love influences his whole conversation. A sense of his own infirmities makes him candid to those of others. He will not readily believe reports to their prejudice, without sufficient proof; and even then, he will not repeat them, unless he is lawfully called to it. He believes that the precept, "Speak evil of no man," is founded upon the same authority with those which forbid committing adultery or murder, and therefore he "keeps his tongue as with a bridle."

Lastly, faith is of daily use as a preservative from a compliance with the corrupt customs and maxims of the world. The believer, though *in* the world, is not *of* it. By faith he triumphs over its smiles and enticements; he sees that all that is in the world, suited to gratify the desires of the flesh or the eye, is not only to be avoided as sinful, but as incompatible with his best pleasures. He will mix with the world so far as is necessary in the discharge of the duties of that station of life in which the providence of God has placed him, but no farther. His leisure and inclinations are engaged in a different pursuit. They who fear the Lord are his chosen companions; and the blessings he derives from the word, and throne, and ordinances of grace, make him look upon the poor pleasures and amusements of those who live without God in the world with a mixture of disdain and pity; and by faith he is proof against its frowns. He will obey God rather than man. He will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will rather reprove them." And if, upon this account, he should be despised, and injuriously treated, whatever loss he suffers in such a cause he accounts his gain, and esteems such disgrace his glory.

I am not aiming to draw a perfect character, but to show the proper effects of that faith which justifies, which purifies the heart, which worketh by love, and overcomes the world. An habitual endeavor to possess such a frame of spirit, and thus to adorn the gospel of Christ, and that with growing success, is what I am persuaded you are not a stranger to; and I am afraid that they who can content themselves with aiming at any thing short of this in their profession, are too much strangers to themselves, and to the

nature of that liberty wherewith Jesus has promised to make his people free. That you may go on from strength to strength, increasing in the light and image of our Lord and Saviour, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER VII.

ON THE PROPRIETY OF A MINISTERIAL ADDRESS TO THE UNCONVERTED.

SIR,

IN a late conversation, you desired my thoughts concerning a scriptural and consistent manner of addressing the consciences of unawakened sinners in the course of your ministry. It is a point on which many eminent ministers have been, and are, not a little divided; and it therefore becomes me to propose my sentiments with modesty and caution, so far as I am constrained to differ from any, from whom, in general, I would be glad to learn.

Some think that it is sufficient to preach the great truths of the word of God in their hearing; to set forth the utterly ruined and helpless state of fallen man by nature, and the appointed method of salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and then to leave the application entirely to the agency of the Holy Spirit, who alone can enlighten the dark understandings of sinners, and enable them to receive, in a due manner, the doctrines either of the law or the gospel. And they apprehend, that all exhortations, arguments, and motives, addressed to those who are supposed to be still under the influence of a carnal mind, are inconsistent with the principles of free grace, and the acknowledged inability of such persons to perform any spiritual acts; and that, therefore, the preachers who, avowing the doctrines of free grace, do, notwithstanding, plead and expostulate with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their application what they had labored to establish in the course of their sermons.

There are others, who, though they would be extremely unwilling to derogate from the free grace and sovereign power of God in the great work of conversion, or in the

least degree to encourage the mistaken notion which every unconverted person has of his own power, yet think it their duty to deal with sinners as rational and moral agents; and as such, besides declaring the counsel of God in a doctrinal way, to warn them by the terrors of the Lord, and to beseech them, by his tender mercies, that they receive not the grace of God in a preached gospel in vain. Nor can it be denied, but that some of them, when deeply affected with the worth of souls, and the awful importance of eternal things, have sometimes, in the warmth of their hearts, dropped unguarded expressions, and such as have been justly liable to exception.

If we were to decide to which of these different methods of preaching the preference is due, by the discernible effects of each, it will, perhaps, appear in fact, without making any invidious comparisons, that those ministers whom the Lord has honored with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally been led to adopt the more popular way of exhortation or address; while they who have been studiously careful to avoid any direct application to sinners, as unnecessary and improper, if they have not been altogether without seals to their ministry, yet their labors have been more owned in building up those who have already received the knowledge of the truth, than in adding to their number. Now, as "he that winneth souls is wise," and as every faithful laborer has a warm desire of being instrumental in raising the dead in sin to a life of righteousness, this seems at least a presumptive argument in favor of those who, besides stating the doctrines of the gospel, endeavor, by earnest persuasions and expostulations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and entreat and warn them to consider "how they shall escape, if they neglect so great salvation." For it is not easy to conceive that the Lord should most signally bear testimony in favor of that mode of preaching which is least consistent with the truth, and with itself.

But not to insist on this, nor to rest the cause on the authority or examples of men, the best of whom are imperfect and fallible, let us consult the Scriptures, which, as they furnish us with the whole subject-matter of our ministry, so they afford us perfect precepts and patterns for its due and orderly dispensation. With respect to the sub-

ject of our inquiry, the examples of our Lord Christ, and of his authorized ministers, the apostles, are both our rule and our warrant. The Lord Jesus was the great preacher of free grace, "who spake as never man spake;" and his ministry, while it provided relief for the weary and heavy-laden, was eminently designed to stain the pride of all human glory. He knew what was in man, and declared, that none could come unto him, unless drawn and taught of God, John 6:44—46. And yet he often speaks to sinners in terms, which, if they were not known to be his, might, perhaps, be censured as inconsistent and legal, John 6:27. Luke 13:24—27. John 12:35.—It appears, both from the context and tenor of these passages, that they were immediately spoken not to his disciples, but to the multitude. The apostles copied from their Lord: they taught, that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, even to think a good thought, and that "it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy;" yet they plainly call upon sinners (and that before they had given evident signs that they were pricked to the heart, as Acts 3:31.) "to repent, and to turn from their vanities to the living God," Acts 3:19. and 14:15. and 17:30. Peter's advice to Simon Magus is very full and express to this point: for though he perceived him to be "in the very gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity," he exhorted him "to repent, and to pray, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven." It may be presumed, that we cannot have stronger evidence, that any of our hearers are in a carnal and unconverted state, than Peter had in the case of Simon Magus; and therefore there seems no sufficient reason why we should hesitate to follow the apostle's example.

You have been told, that repentance and faith are spiritual acts, for the performance of which, a principle of spiritual life is absolutely necessary: and that, therefore, to exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to call a dead person out of his grave. To this it may be answered, that we might cheerfully and confidently undertake even to call the dead out of their graves, if we had the command and promise of God to warrant the attempt; for then we might expect his power would accompany our word. The vision of Ezekiel, chap.

37. may be fitly accommodated to illustrate both the difficulties and the encouragement of a gospel minister. The deplorable state of many of our hearers may often remind us of the Lord's question to the prophet, "Can these dry bones live?" Our resource, like that of the prophet, is entirely in the sovereignty, grace, and power of the Lord: "O Lord, thou knowest, impossible as it is to us, it is easy for thee to raise them unto life; therefore we renounce our own reasonings; and though we see that they are dead, we call upon them at thy bidding, as if they were alive, and say, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! The means is our part, the work is thine, and to thee be all the praise." The dry bones could not hear the prophet; but while he spoke, the Lord caused breath to enter into them, and they lived; but the word was spoken to them considered as dry and dead.

It is true the Lord can, and I hope he often does, make that preaching effectual to the conversion of sinners, wherein little is said expressly to them, only the truths of the gospel are declared in their hearing; but he who knows the frame of the human heart, has provided us with a variety of the topics which have a moral suitableness to engage the faculties, affections, and consciences of sinners, so far at least as to leave themselves condemned if they persist in their sins, and by which he often effects the purposes of his grace; though none of the means of grace by which he ordinarily works can produce a real change in the heart, unless they are accompanied with the efficacious power of his Spirit. Should we admit, that an unconverted person is not a proper subject of ministerial exhortation, because he has no power in himself to comply, the just consequence of this position would, perhaps, extend too far, even to prove the impropriety of all exhortation universally: for when we invite the weary and heavy-laden to come to Jesus, that they may find rest; when we call upon backsliders to remember from whence they are fallen, "to repent, and to do their first works;" yea, when we exhort believers "to walk worthy of God, who has called them to his kingdom and glory;" in each of these cases we press them to acts for which they have no inherent power of their own; and unless the Lord the Spirit is pleased to apply the word to their hearts, we do but speak to the air; and our

endeavors can have no more effect in these instances, than if we were to say to a dead body, "Arise, and walk." For an exertion of divine power is no less necessary to the healing of a wounded conscience, than to the breaking of a hard heart; and only he who has begun the good work of grace is able either to revive or to maintain it.

Though sinners are destitute of spiritual life, they are not therefore mere machines. They have a power to do many things, which they may be called upon to exert. They are capable of considering their ways; they know they are mortal; and the bulk of them are persuaded, in their consciences, that after death there is an appointed judgment. They are not under an inevitable necessity of living in known and gross sins; that they do so, is not for want of power, but for want of will. The most profane swearer can refrain from his oaths while in the presence of a person whom he fears, and to whom he knows it would be displeasing. Let a drunkard see poison put into his liquor, and it may stand by him untasted from morning to night. And many would be deterred from sins, to which they are greatly addicted, by the presence of a child, though they have no fear of God before their eyes. They have a power, likewise, of attending upon the means of grace; and though the Lord only can give them true faith, and evangelical repentance, there seems no impropriety to invite them, upon the ground of the gospel-promises, to seek to him who is exalted to bestow these blessings, and who is able to do that for them which they cannot do for themselves, and who has said, "Him, that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Perhaps it will not be easily proved, that entreaties, arguments, warnings, formed upon these general principles, which are, in the main, agreeable and adequate to the remaining light of natural conscience, are at all inconsistent with those doctrines which ascribe the whole of a sinner's salvation, from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should, undoubtedly, endeavor to maintain a consistency in our preaching; but unless we keep the plan and manner of the Scripture constantly in view, and attend to every part of it, a design of consistency may fetter our sentiments, and greatly preclude our usefulness. We need not wish to be more consistent than the inspired writers, nor

be afraid of speaking, as they have spoken before us. We may easily perplex ourselves, and our hearers, by nice reasonings on the nature of human liberty, and the divine agency on the hearts of men; but such disquisitions are better avoided. We shall, perhaps, never have full satisfaction on these subjects till we arrive in the world of light. In the meantime, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If, when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favors you with a lively sense of the greatness of the trust, and the worth of the souls committed to your charge, and fills your heart with his constraining love, many little curious distinctions, which amused you at other times, will be forgotten. Your soul will go forth with your words; and while your bowels yearn over poor sinners, you will not hesitate a moment whether you ought to warn them of their danger or not. That great champion of free grace, Dr. Owen, has a very solemn address to sinners, the running title to which is, "Exhortations unto believing." It is in his Exposition of the 130th Psalm, from p. 242 to 247. London edition, 1609, which I recommend to your attentive consideration. I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

ON THE INWARD WITNESS TO THE GROUND AND REALITY OF FAITH.

SIR,

I READILY offer you my thoughts on 1 John 5:10. "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself;" though, perhaps, you will think I am writing a sermon rather than a letter. If we believe in the Son of God, whatever trials we may meet with in the present life, our best concerns are safe, and our happiness is sure. If we do not, whatever else we have, or seem to have, we are in a state of condemnation; and living and dying so, must perish. Thousands, it is to be feared, persuade themselves that they are believers, though they cannot stand the test of Scripture. And there are many real believers, who, through the prevalence of remaining unbelief, and the

temptations of Satan, form hard conclusions against themselves, though the Scripture speaks peace to them. But how does this correspond with the passage before us, which asserts universally, "He that believeth, hath the witness in himself?" for can a man have the witness in himself, and yet not know it? It may be answered, The evidence, in its own nature, is sufficient and infallible; but we are very apt, when we would form a judgment of ourselves, to superadd rules and marks of trial, which are not given us for that purpose in the Bible. That the word and Spirit of God do witness for his children, is a point in which many are agreed, who are far from being agreed as to the nature and manner of that witness. It is, therefore, very desirable rightly to understand the evidence by which we are to judge whether we are believers are not.

The importance and truth of the gospel-salvation is witnessed to in heaven, by "the Father, the Word, and the Spirit." It is witnessed to on earth, by "the Spirit, the water, and the blood," verses 7 and 8. The Spirit, in verse 8, I apprehend, denotes a divine light in the understanding, communicated by the Spirit of God, enabling the soul to perceive and approve the truth. The water seems to intend the powerful influence of this knowledge and light in the work of sanctification. And the blood, the application of the blood of Jesus to the conscience, relieving it from guilt and fear, and imparting a "peace which passes all understanding." And he that believeth hath this united testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, not by hearsay only, but in himself. According to the measure of his faith, (for faith has various degrees,) he has a living proof that the witness is true, by the effects wrought in his own heart.

These things, which God has joined together, are too often attempted to be separated. Attempts of this kind have been a principal source and cause of most of the dangerous errors and mistakes which are to be found among professors of religion. Some say much concerning the Spirit, and lay claim to an inward light, whereby they think they know the things of God. Others lay great stress upon the water; maintaining a regular conversation, abstaining from the defilements of the world, and aiming at a mastery over their natural desires and tempers; but neither the one

nor the other appear to be duly sensible of the value of the blood of atonement, as the sole ground of their acceptance, and the spring of their life and strength. Others, again, are all for the blood; can speak much of Jesus, and his blood and righteousness; though it does not appear that they are truly spiritually enlightened to perceive the beauty and harmony of gospel-truths, or that they pay a due regard to that holiness without which no man can see the Lord. But Jesus came, not by water only, or by blood only, but by water and blood; and the Spirit bears witness to both, because the Spirit is truth. The water alone affords but a cold starched form of godliness, destitute of that enlivening power which is derived from a knowledge of the preciousness of Jesus, as the Lamb that was slain. And if any talk of the blood without the water, they do but turn the grace of God into licentiousness; so, likewise, to pretend to the Spirit, and at the same time to have low thoughts of Jesus, is a delusion and vanity; for the true Spirit testifies and takes of his glory, and presents it to the soul. But the real believer receives the united testimony, and has the witness in himself that he does so.

To have the witness in ourselves, is to have the truths that are declared in the Scripture revealed in our hearts. This brings an experimental conviction, which may be safely depended on, that "we have received the grace of God in truth." A man born blind may believe that the sun is bright upon the testimony of another; but if he should obtain his sight, he would have the witness in himself. Believing springs from a sense and perception of the truths of the gospel; and whoever hath this spiritual perception is a believer. He has the witness in himself. He has received the Spirit; his understanding is enlightened, whereby he sees things to be as they are described in the word of God, respecting his own state of sin, and the utter impossibility of his obtaining relief by any other means than those proposed in the gospel. These things are hidden from us by nature. He has likewise received the blood. The knowledge of sin, and its demerits, if alone, would drive us to despair; but by the same light of the Spirit, Jesus is apprehended as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour. All that is declared concerning his person, offices, love, sufferings, and obedience, is understood and approved. Here the

wounded and weary soul finds healing and rest. Then the apostle's language is adopted, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He has likewise received the water, considered as the emblem of sanctification. To a believer, all that the Scripture teaches concerning the nature, beauty, and necessity of holiness, as a living principle in the heart, carries conviction and evidence. A deliverance from the power, as well as from the guilt of sin, appears to be an important and essential part of salvation. He sees his original and his proper happiness, that nothing less than communion with God, and conformity to him, is worth his pursuit. And therefore he can say, "My soul thirsteth for thee; I delight in the law of God after the inward man." In a word, his judgment and his choice are formed upon a new spiritual taste, derived from the written word, and correspondent with it, as the musical ear is adapted to relish harmony: so that what God has forbidden appears hateful, what he has commanded, necessary; what he has promised, desirable; and what he has revealed, glorious. Whoever has these perceptions, has the witness in himself that he has been taught of God, and believes in his Son.

If you think this explanation is agreeable to the Scripture, you will be satisfied that the witness spoken of in this passage is very different from what some persons understand it to be. It is not an impulse, or strong persuasion, impressed upon us in a way of which we can give no account, that "we are the children of God," and that our sins are freely forgiven; nor is the powerful application of a particular text of Scripture necessary to produce it; neither is it always connected with a very lively and sensible comfort. These things, in some persons, and instances, may accompany the witness or testimony we are speaking of, but do not properly belong to it; and they may be, and often have been, counterfeited. But what I have described is inimitable and infallible; it is indubitably, as the magicians confessed of the miracles of Moses, the finger of God, as certainly the effect of his divine power as the creation of the world. It is true, many who have this witness walk in darkness, and are harassed with many doubts and perplexities concerning their state; but this is not because the witness

is not sufficient to give them satisfaction, but because they do not account it so: being misled by the influence of self-will and a legal spirit, they overlook this evidence, as too simple, and expect something extraordinary; at least, they think they cannot be right, unless they are led in the same way in which the Lord has been pleased to lead others, with whom they may have conversed. But the Lord the Spirit is sovereign and free in his operations; and though he gives to all who are the subjects of his grace the same views of sin, of themselves, and of the Saviour; yet, with respect to the circumstantialia of his work, there is, as in the features of our faces, such an amazing variety, that perhaps no two persons can be found whose experiences have been exactly alike: but, as the apostle says, that "he that believeth," that is, whosoever believeth, without exception, "has the witness in himself;" it must, consequently, arise from what is common to them all, and not from what is peculiar to a few.

Before I conclude, I would make two or three observations. In the first place, I think it is plain, that the supposition of a real believer's living in sin, or taking encouragement from the gospel so to do, is destitute of the least foundation in truth, and can only proceed from an ignorance of the subject. Sin is the burden under which he groans, and he would account nothing short of a deliverance from it worthy the name of salvation. A principal part of his evidence that he is a believer arises from that abhorrence of sin which he habitually feels. It is true, sin still dwelleth in him; but he loathes and resists it: upon this account he is in a state of continual warfare; if he was not so, he could not have the witness in himself that he is born of God.

Again, from hence arises a solid evidence that the Scripture is indeed the word of God, because it so exactly describes what is exemplified in the experience of all who are subjects of a work of grace. While we are in a natural state, it is to us as a sealed book: though we can read it, and perhaps assent to the facts, we can no more understand our own concerns in what we read, than if it was written in an unknown tongue. But when the mind is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the Scripture addresses

us as it were by name, explains every difficulty under which we labored, and proposes an adequate and effectual remedy for the relief of all our wants and fears.

Lastly, it follows that the hope of a believer is built upon a foundation that cannot be shaken, though it may, and will be, assaulted. It does not depend upon occasional and changeable frames, upon any that is precarious and questionable, but upon a correspondence and agreement with the written word. Nor does this agreement depend upon a train of labored arguments and deductions, but is self-evident, as light is to the eye, to every person who has a real participation of the grace of God. It is equally suited to all capacities; by this the unlearned are enabled to know their election of God, and to "rejoice with a joy unspeakable, and full of glory." And the wisest, if destitute of this perception, though they may be masters of all the external evidences of Christianity, and able to combat the cavils of infidels, can see no real beauty in the truths of the gospel, nor derive any solid comfort from them.

I have only sent you a few hasty hints: it would be easy to enlarge; but I sat down, not to write a book, but a letter. May this inward witness preside with power in our hearts, to animate our hopes, and to mortify our corruptions!

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

ON THE DOCTRINES OF ELECTION AND FINAL PERSEVERANCE.

DEAR SIR,

YOUR letter breathes the spirit of a Christian, though you say you are not a Calvinist. I should have still confined myself, in my letters, to the great truths in which we are agreed, if you had not invited me to touch upon the points wherein we differ. If you were positive and peremptory in your present sentiments, I should not think it my duty to debate with you; in that case, we might contend as much for victory as for truth. But as you profess yourself an inquirer, and are desirous of forming your judgment agreeably to the word of God, without being influenced by the

authority of names and parties, I willingly embrace the occasion you offer me. You say, that though you are not prejudiced against the doctrines of election and perseverance of the saints, they appear to you attended with such difficulties, that you cannot yet heartily and fully assent to them. May the Lord the Spirit, whose office it is to guide his people into all truth, dictate to my pen, and accompany what I shall write with his blessing.

It is not my intention to prove and illustrate these doctrines at large, or to encounter the various objections that have been raised against them. So much has been done in this way already, that I could only repeat what has been said to greater advantage by others. Nor need I refer you to the books which have been professedly written upon this argument. In a letter to a friend, I shall not aim at the exactness of a disputant, but only offer a few unpremeditated hints, in the same manner as if I had the pleasure of personally conversing with you.

Permit me to remind you, in the first place, of that important aphorism, John 3:27. (which, by the bye, seems to speak strongly in favor of the doctrines in question,) "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." If you should accede to my opinions upon my persuasion only, you would be little benefitted by the exchange. The Lord alone can give us the true, vital, comfortable, and useful, knowledge of his own truths. We may become wise in notions, and so far masters of a system or scheme or doctrines, as to be able to argue, object, and fight, in favor of our own hypothesis, by dint of application, and natural abilities; but we rightly understand what we say, and whereof we affirm, no farther than we have a spiritual perception of it wrought in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is not, therefore, by noisy disputation, but by humble waiting upon God in prayer, and a careful perusal of his holy word, that we are to expect a satisfactory, experimental, and efficacious, knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. I am persuaded, that you are seeking in this way; if so, I am confident, you shall not seek in vain. The Lord teaches effectually, though, for the most part, gradually. The path of the just is compared to the light, which is very faint at the early dawn, but shineth more and more to the perfect day.

If you sincerely seek the Lord's direction by prayer, you will of course make use of his appointed means of information, and search the Scriptures. Give me leave to offer you the following advices, while you are reading and comparing spiritual things with spiritual. First, not to lay too great stress upon a few detached texts, but seek for that sense which is most agreeable to the general strain of the Scripture. The infallible word of God must doubtless be consistent with itself. If it does not appear so to us, the obscurity and seeming inconsistency must be charged to the remaining darkness and ignorance of our minds. As many locks, whose wards differ, are opened with equal ease by one master-key, so there is a certain comprehensive view of scriptural truth, which opens hard places, solves objections, and happily reconciles, illustrates, and harmonizes many texts, which, to those who have not this master-key, frequently styled the analogy of faith, appear little less than contradictory to each other. When you obtain this key, you will be sure that you have the right sense.

Again, you will do well to consult experience as you go along. For though this is not to be depended upon in the first instance, but must itself be subjected to the rule of the written word, yet it is a good subordinate help. Consider which sense is most agreeable to what passes within you and around you, and which best answers to the dealings of God with yourself, and to what you can observe of his dealings with others.

Farther, when you are led (as I think you will be, if you are not already) to view the Calvinist doctrines in a favorable light, be not afraid of embracing them, because there may be, perhaps, some objections, which, for want of a full possession of the key I mentioned, you are not able to clear up; but consider if there are not as strong, or stronger, objections against the other side. We are poor weak creatures: and the clearing up of every difficulty is not what we are immediately called to, but rather to seek that light which may strengthen and feed our souls.

Lastly, compare the tendency of different opinions. This is an excellent rule, if we can fairly apply it. Whatever is from God has a sure tendency to ascribe glory to him, to exclude boasting from the creature, to promote the love and practice of holiness, and increase our dependence upon

his grace and faithfulness. The Calvinists have no reason to be afraid of resting the merits of their cause upon this issue, notwithstanding the unjust misrepresentations which have been often made of their principles, and the ungenerous treatment of those who would charge the miscarriages of a few individuals as the necessary consequence of embracing those principles.

But I must check myself, or I shall finish my letter before I properly begin my subject. You have objections to the doctrine of election. You will, however, agree with me, that the Scripture does speak of it, and that in very strong and express terms, particularly St. Paul. I have met with some sincere people, as I believe, who have told me that they could not bear to read his 8th chapter to the Romans, but always passed it over; so that their prejudices against election, prejudiced them against a part of the Scripture likewise. But why so, unless because the dreaded doctrine is maintained too plainly to be evaded? But you will say, that some writers and preachers attempt to put an easier sense upon the apostle's words. Let us judge *then*, as I lately proposed, from experience. Admitting, what I am sure you will admit, the total depravity of human nature, how can we account for the conversion of a soul to God, unless we likewise admit an election of grace? The work must begin somewhere. Either the sinner first seeks the Lord, or the Lord first seeks the sinner. The former is impossible, if by nature we are dead in trespasses and sins; if the God of this world has blinded our eyes, and maintains the possession of our hearts; and if our carnal minds, so far from being disposed to seek God, are enmity against him. Let me appeal to yourself. I think you know yourself too well to say, that you either sought or loved the Lord first; perhaps you are conscious, that for a season, and so far as in you lay, you even resisted his call, and must have perished, if he had not made you willing, in the day of his power, and saved you in defiance of yourself. In your own case, you acknowledge that he began with you; and it must be the case universally with all that are called, if the whole race of mankind are by nature enemies to God. Then farther, there must be an election, unless *all* are called. But we are assured that the broad road, which is thronged with the greatest multitudes, leads to de-

struction. Were not you and I in this road? Were we better than those who continue in it still? What has made us differ from our former selves? Grace. What has made us differ from those who are now as we once were? Grace. Then this grace, by the very terms, must be differencing, or distinguishing grace; that is, in other words, electing grace. And to suppose that God should make this election or choice only at the time of our calling, is not only unscriptural, but contrary to the dictates of right reason, and the ideas we have of the divine perfections, particularly those of omniscience and immutability. They who believe there is any power in man by nature, whereby he can turn to God, may contend for a conditional election upon the foresight of faith and obedience; but while others dispute, let you and me admire; for we know that the Lord foresaw us (as we were) in a state utterly incapable either of believing or obeying, unless he was pleased to work in us to will and to do according to his own good pleasure.

As to final perseverance, whatever judgment we form of it in a doctrinal view, unless we ourselves do so persevere, our profession of religion will be utterly vain; for only "they that endure to the end shall be saved." It should seem, that whoever believes this, and is duly apprized of his own weakness, the number and strength of his spiritual enemies, and the difficulties and dangers arising from his situation in this evil world, will at least be desirous to have, if possible, some security, that his labor and expectation shall not be in vain. To be at an uncertainty in a point of so great importance, to have nothing to trust to for our continuance in well-doing, but our own feeble efforts, our partial diligence, and short-sighted care, must surely be distressing, if we rightly consider how unable we are in ourselves to withstand the forces of the devil, the world, and the flesh, which are combined against our peace. In this view, I should expect that the opposers of this doctrine, if thoroughly sensible of their state and situation, upon a supposition that they should be able to prove it unscriptural and false, would weep over their victory, and be sorry that a sentiment, so apparently suited to encourage and animate our hope, should not be founded in truth. It is not to be wondered at, that this doctrine, which gives to the Lord the glory due to his name, and provides so effectually for the

comfort of his people, should be opposed and traduced by men of corrupt hearts. But it may well seem strange, that they who feel their need of it, and cannot be comfortable without it, should be afraid or unwilling to receive it. Yet many a child of light is walking in darkness upon this account. Either they are staggered by the sentiments of those whom they think wiser than themselves, or stumbled by the falls of professors who were once advocates for this doctrine, or perplexed because they cannot rightly understand those passages of Scripture which seem to speak a different language. But as light and knowledge increase, these difficulties are lessened. The Lord claims the honor, and he engages for the accomplishment of a complete salvation, that no power shall pluck his people out of his hand, or separate them from his love. Their perseverance in grace, besides being asserted in many express promises, may be proved with the fullest evidence from the unchangeableness of God, the intercession of Christ, the union which subsists between him and his people, and from the principle of spiritual life he has implanted in their hearts, which, in its own nature, is connected with everlasting life; for grace is the seed of glory. I have not room to enlarge on these particulars, but refer you to the following texts, from which various strong and invincible arguments might be drawn for their confirmation: Luke 14:28—30. compared with Phil. 1:6. Heb. 7:24. with Rom. 8:34—39. John 14:19. with John 15:1,2. John 4:14. Upon these grounds, my friend, why may not you, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before you, and committed your soul to Jesus, rejoice in his salvation; and say, “While Christ is the foundation, root, head, and husband of his people, while the word of God is Yea and Amen, while the counsels of God are unchangeable, while we have a Mediator and High Priest before the throne, while the Holy Spirit is willing and able to bear witness to the truths of the gospel, while God is wiser than men, and stronger than Satan, so long the believer in Jesus is and shall be safe. Heaven and earth may pass away, but the promise, the oath, and the blood, on which my soul relies, afford me a security which can never fail.”

As the doctrines of election and perseverance are comfortable, so they cut off all pretence of boasting and self-

dependence, when they are truly received in the heart, and therefore tend to exalt the Saviour. Of course they stain the pride of all human glory, and leave us nothing to glory in but the Lord. The more we are convinced of our utter depravity and inability from first to last, the more excellent will Jesus appear. The whole may give the physician a good word, but the sick alone know how to prize him. And here I cannot but remark a difference between those who have nothing to trust to but free grace, and those who ascribe a little, at least, to some good disposition and ability in man. We assent to whatever they enforce from the word of God on the subject of sanctification. We acknowledge its importance, its excellency, its beauty; but we could wish they would join more with us in exalting the Redeemer's name. Their experience seems to lead them to talk of themselves, of the change that is wrought in them, and the much that depends upon their own watchfulness and striving. We likewise would be thankful if we could perceive a change wrought in us by the power of grace. We desire to be found watching likewise. But when our hopes are most alive, it is less from a view of the imperfect beginnings of grace in our hearts, than from an apprehension of him who is our all in all. His person, his love, his sufferings, his intercession, compassion, fulness, and faithfulness,—these are our delightful themes, which leave us little leisure, when in our best frames, to speak of ourselves. How do our hearts soften, and our eyes melt, when we feel some liberty in thinking and speaking of him! For we had no help in time past, nor can have any in time to come, but from him alone. If any persons have contributed a mite to their own salvation, it was more than we could do. If any were obedient and faithful to the first calls and impressions of his Spirit, it was not our case. If any were prepared to receive him before hand, we know that we were in a state of alienation from him. We needed sovereign irresistible grace to save us, or we had been lost for ever. If there are any who have a power of their own, we must confess ourselves poorer than they are. We cannot watch, unless he watches with us; we cannot strive, unless he strives with us; we cannot stand one moment, unless he holds us up; and we believe we must perish after all, unless his faithfulness is engaged to keep us. But this, we

trust, he will do, not for our righteousness, but for his own name's sake; and because, having loved us with an everlasting love, he has been pleased, in loving-kindness, to draw us to himself, and to be found of us when we sought him not.

Can you think, dear sir, that a person who lives under the influence of these sentiments, will desire to continue in sin, because grace abounds? No; you are too candid an observer of men and manners to believe the calumnies which are propagated against us. It is true, there are too many false and empty professors amongst us; but are there none amongst those who hold the opposite sentiments? And I would observe, that the objection drawn from the mis-carriages of reputed Calvinists is quite beside the purpose. We maintain, that no doctrines or means can change the heart, or produce a gracious conversation, without the efficacious power of almighty grace; therefore, if it is found to be so in fact, it should not be charged against our doctrine, but rather admitted as a proof and confirmation of it. We confess, that we fall sadly short in every thing, and have reason to be ashamed and amazed that we are so faintly influenced by such animating principles; yet, upon the whole, our consciences bear us witness, and we hope we may declare it both to the church and to the world, without just fear of contradiction, that the doctrines of grace are doctrines according to godliness. I am, &c.

LETTER X.

A; OR, GRACE IN THE BLADE. MARK 4:28.

DEAR SIR,

ACCORDING to your desire, I sit down to give you my general views of a progressive work of grace, in the several stages of a believer's experience, which I shall mark by the different characters, A, B, C, answerable to the distinctions our Lord teaches us to observe from the growth of the corn, Mark 4:28. "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." The Lord leads all his people effectually and savingly to the knowledge of the

same essential truths, but in such a variety of methods, that it will be needful, in this disquisition, to set aside, as much as possible, such things as may be only personal and occasional in the experience of each, and to collect those only which, in a greater or less degree, are common to them all. I shall not, therefore, give you a copy of my own experience, or of that of any individual; but shall endeavor, as clearly as I can, to state what the Scripture teaches us concerning the nature and essentials of a work of grace, so far as it will bear a general application to all those who are the subjects of gracious operations.

By nature we are all dead in trespasses and sins, not only strangers to God, but in a state of enmity and opposition to his government and grace. In this respect, whatever difference there may be in the characters of men as members of society, they are all, whether wise or ignorant, whether sober or profane, equally incapable of receiving or approving divine truths, 1 Cor. 2:14. On this ground our Lord declares, "No man can come unto me, except the Father who has sent me draws him." Though the term Father most frequently expresses a known and important distinction in the adorable Trinity, I apprehend our Lord sometimes uses it to denote God, or the Divine Nature, in contradistinction from his humanity, as in John 14:9. And this I take to be the sense here: "No man can come unto me, unless he is taught of God," and wrought upon by a divine power. The immediate exertion of this power, according to the economy of salvation, is rather ascribed to the Holy Spirit than to the Father, John 16:8—11. But it is the power of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore severally attributed to the Father, Son, and Spirit, John 5:21. and ch. 6:44.63. 2 Cor. 3:18. 2 Thess. 3:5.

By A, I would understand a person who is under the drawings of God, which will infallibly lead him to the Lord Jesus Christ, for life and salvation. The beginning of this work is instantaneous. It is effected by a certain kind of light communicated to the soul, to which it was before an utter stranger. The eyes of the understanding are opened and enlightened. The light at first afforded is weak and indistinct, like the morning dawn; but when it is once begun, it will certainly increase, and spread to the perfect day. We commonly speak as if conviction of sin was the

first work of God upon the soul that he is in mercy about to draw unto himself. But I think this is inaccurate. Conviction is only a part, or rather an immediate effect of that first work; and there are many convictions which do not at all spring from it, and therefore are only occasional and temporary, though for a season they may be very sharp, and put a person upon doing many things. In order to a due conviction of sin, we must previously have some adequate conceptions of the God with whom we have to do. Sin may be feared as dangerous without this; but its nature and demerit can only be understood by being contrasted with the holiness, majesty, goodness, and truth, of the God against whom it is committed. No outward means, no mercies, judgments, or ordinances, can communicate such a discovery of God, or produce such a conviction of sin, without the concurrence of this divine light and power to the soul. The natural conscience and passions may indeed be so far wrought upon by outward means, as to stir up some desires and endeavors; but if these are not founded in a spiritual apprehension of the perfections of God, according to the revelation he has made of himself in his word, they will sooner or later come to nothing; and the person affected will either return by degrees to his former ways, 2 Peter 2: 20. or he will sink into a self-righteous form of godliness, destitute of the power, Luke 18:11. And therefore, as there are so many things in the dispensation of the gospel suited to work upon the natural passions of men, the many woful miscarriages and apostacies amongst professors are more to be lamented than wondered at. For though the seed may seem to spring up, and look green for a season, if there be not depth for it to take root, it will surely wither away. We may be unable to judge with certainty upon the first appearance of a religious profession, whether the work be thus deep and spiritual, or not; but "the Lord knows them that are his;" and wherever it is real, it is an infallible token of salvation. Now, as God only thus reveals himself by the medium of Scripture-truth, the light received this way leads the soul to the Scripture, from whence it springs, and all the leading truths of the word of God soon begin to be perceived and assented to. The evil of sin is acknowledged, the evil of the heart is felt. There may be, for a while, some efforts to obtain the favor of

God by prayer, repentance, and reformation; but, for the most part, it is not very long before these things are proved to be vain and ineffectual. The soul, like the woman mentioned Mark 5:26. wearied with vain expedients, finds itself worse and worse, and is gradually brought to see the necessity and sufficiency of the gospel-salvation. A man soon be a believer thus far: That he believes the word of God, sees and feels things to be as they are thus described, hates and avoids sin, because he knows it is displeasing to God, and contrary to his goodness; he receives the record which God has given of his Son, has his heart affected and drawn to Jesus by views of his glory, and of his love to poor sinners; ventures upon his name and promises as his only encouragement to come to a throne of grace; waits diligently in the use of all means appointed for the communion and growth of grace; loves the Lord's people, accounts them the excellent of the earth, and delights in their conversation. He is longing, waiting, and praying for a share in those blessings which he believes they enjoy, and can be satisfied with nothing less. He is convinced of the power of Jesus to save him; but, through remaining ignorance and legality, the remembrance of sin committed, and the sense of present corruption, he often questions his willingness; and, not knowing the abounding of grace, and the security of the promises, he fears lest the compassionate Saviour should spurn him from his feet.

While he is thus young in the knowledge of the gospel, burdened with sin, and, perhaps, beset with Satan's temptations, the Lord, "who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom," is pleased, at times, to favor him with cordials, that he may not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Perhaps his heart is enlarged in prayer, or under hearing, or some good promise is brought home to his mind, and applied with power and sweetness. He mistakes the nature and design of these comforts, which are not given him to rest in, but to encourage him to press forward. He thinks he is then right, because he has them, and fondly hopes to have them always. Then his mountain stands strong. But ere long he feels a change; his comforts are withdrawn; he finds no heart to pray; no attention in hearing; indwelling sin revives with fresh strength, and, perhaps, Satan returns with redoubled rage. Then he is at

his wit's end; thinks his hopes were presumptuous, and his comforts delusions. He wants to feel something that may give him a warrant to trust in the free promises of Christ. His views of the Redeemer's gracefulness are very narrow; he sees not the harmony and glory of the divine attributes in the salvation of a sinner; he sighs for mercy, but fears that justice is against him. However, by these changing dispensations, the Lord is training him up, and bringing him forward. He receives grace from Jesus, whereby he is enabled to fight against sin; his conscience is tender; his troubles are chiefly spiritual troubles; and he thinks, if he could but attain a sure and abiding sense of his acceptance in the Beloved, hardly any outward trial would be capable of giving him much disturbance. Indeed, notwithstanding the weakness of his faith, and the prevalence of a legal spirit, which greatly hurts him, there are some things in his present experience which he may, perhaps, look back upon with regret hereafter, when his hope and knowledge will be more established; particularly that sensibility and keenness of appetite with which he now attends the ordinances, desiring the sincere milk of the word with earnestness and eagerness, as a babe does the breast. He counts the hours from one opportunity to another; and the attention and desire with which he hears may be read in his countenance. His zeal is likewise lively; and may be, for want of more experience, too importunate and forward. He has a love for souls, and a concern for the glory of God, which, though it may at some times create him trouble, and at others be mixed with some undue motions of self, yet, in its principle, is highly desirable and commendable, John 18:10.

The grace of God influences both the understanding and the affections. Warm affections, without knowledge, can rise no higher than superstition; and that knowledge which does not influence the heart and affections, will only make a hypocrite. The true believer is rewarded in both respects, yet we may observe, that though A is not without knowledge, this state is more usually remarkable for the warmth and liveliness of the affections. On the other hand, as the work advances, though the affections are not left out, yet it seems to be carried on principally in the understanding. The old Christian has more solid, judicious, and connected views of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glories of

his person and redeeming love; hence his hope is more established, his dependence more simple, and his peace and strength, *ceteris paribus*, more abiding and uniform than in the case of a young convert; but the latter has, for the most part, the advantage in point of sensible fervency. A tree is most valuable when laden with ripe fruit; but it has a peculiar beauty when in blossom. It is spring-time with A; he is in bloom, and, by the grace and blessing of the heavenly husbandman, will bear fruit in old age. His faith is weak, but his heart is warm. He will seldom venture to think himself a believer; but he sees and feels, and does those things, which no one could, unless the Lord was with him. The very desire and bent of his soul is to God, and to the word of his grace. His knowledge is but small, but it is growing every day. If he is not a father or a young man in grace, he is a dear child. The Lord has visited his heart, delivered him from the love of sin, and fixed his desires supremely upon Jesus Christ. The spirit of bondage is gradually departing from him, and the hour of liberty, which he longs for, is approaching, when, by a further discovery of the glorious gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the Lord's finished salvation. We shall then take notice of him by the name of B, in a second letter, if you are not unwilling that I should prosecute the subject. I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

B; OR, GRACE IN THE EAR. MARK 4:28.

DEAR SIR,

THE manner of the Lord's work in the hearts of his people is not easily traced, though the fact is certain, and the evidence demonstrable from Scripture. In attempting to explain it, we can only speak in general, and are at a loss to form such a description as shall take in the immense variety of cases which occur in the experience of believers. I have already attempted such a general delineation of a young convert, under the character of A, and am now to speak of him by the name of B.

This state I suppose to commence when the soul, after an interchange of hopes and fears, according to the different frames it passes through, is brought to rest in Jesus, by a spiritual apprehension of his complete suitableness and sufficiency, as the wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption of all who trust in him; and is enabled, by an appropriating faith, to say, "He is mine, and I am his." There are various degrees of this persuasion; it is of a growing nature, and is capable of increase so long as we remain in this world. I call it assurance, when it arises from a simple view of the grace and glory of the Saviour, independent of our sensible frames and feelings, so as to enable us to answer all objections from unbelief and Satan with the apostle's words, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us," Rom. 8:34. This, in my judgment, does not belong to the essence of faith, so that B should be deemed more truly a believer than A, but to the establishment of faith. And now faith is stronger, it has more to grapple with. I think the characteristic of the state of A is desire, and of B is conflict. Not that B's desires have subsided, or that A was a stranger to conflict; but as there was a sensible eagerness and keenness in A's desires, which, perhaps, is seldom known to be equally strong afterwards; so there are usually trials and exercises in B's experience, something different in their kind; and sharper in their measure, than what A was exposed to, or indeed had strength to endure. A, like Israel, has been delivered from Egypt by great power and a stretched-out arm; has been pursued and terrified by many enemies, has given himself up for lost again and again. He has at last seen his enemies destroyed, and has sung the song of Moses and the Lamb upon the banks of the Red Sea. Then he commences B. Perhaps, like Israel, he thinks his difficulties are at an end, and expects to go on rejoicing till he enters the promised land. But, alas! his difficulties are in a manner but beginning; he has a wilderness before him, of which he is not aware. The Lord is now about to suit his dispensations to humble and to prove him, and to show what is in his heart, that he may do him good at the latter end, and that all the glory may redound to his own free grace.

Since the Lord hates and abhors sin, and teaches his people, whom he loves, to hate it likewise, it might seem desirable (and all things are equally easy to him) that at the same time they are delivered from the guilt and reigning power of sin, they should likewise be perfectly freed from the defilement of indwelling sin, and be made fully conformable to him at once. His wisdom has, however, appointed otherwise. But from the above premises of his hatred of sin, and his love to his people, I think we may certainly conclude, that he would not suffer sin to remain in them, if he did not purpose to overrule it, for the fuller manifestation of the glory of his grace and wisdom, and for the making his salvation more precious to their souls. It is, however, his command, and therefore their duty; yea, further, from the new nature he has given them, it is their desire to watch and strive against sin, and to propose the mortification of the whole body of sin, and the advancement of sanctification in their hearts, as their great and constant aim, to which they are to have an habitual persevering regard. Upon this plan B sets out. The knowledge of our acceptance with God, and of our everlasting security in Christ, has, in itself, the same tendency upon earth as it will have in heaven, and would, in proportion to the degree of evidence and clearness, produce the same effects of continual love, joy, peace, gratitude, and praise, if there was nothing to counteract it. But B is not all spirit. A depraved nature still cleaves to him, and he has the seeds of every natural corruption yet remaining in his heart. He lives likewise in a world that is full of snares, and occasions, suited to draw forth those corruptions; and he is surrounded by invisible spiritual enemies, the extent of whose power and subtlety he is yet to learn by painful experience. B knows, in general, the nature of his Christian warfare, and sees his right to live upon Jesus for righteousness and strength. He is not unwilling to endure hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; and believes, that though he may be sore thrust at that he may fall, the Lord will be his stay. He knows that his heart is "deceitful, and desperately wicked," but he does not, he cannot, know, at first, the full meaning of that expression. Yet it is for the Lord's glory, and will, in the end, make his grace and love still more precious, that B should find new and mortifying

proofs of an evil nature as he goes on, such as he could not once have believed, had they been foretold to him, as in the case of Peter, Mark 14:29. And in effect, the abominations of the heart do not appear in their full strength and aggravation, but in the case of one who, like B, has tasted that the Lord is gracious, and rejoiced in his salvation. The exceeding sinfulness of sin is manifested not so much by its breaking through the restraint of threatenings and commands, as by its being capable of acting against light and against love. Thus it was with Hezekiah. He had been a faithful and zealous servant of the Lord for many years; but I suppose he knew more of God, and of himself, in the time of his sickness, than he had ever done before. The Lord, who had signally defended him from Sennacherib, was pleased likewise to raise him from the borders of the grave by a miracle, and prolonged the time of his life in answer to prayer. It is plain, from the song which he penned upon his recovery, that he was greatly affected with the mercies he had received; yet still there was something in his heart which he knew not, and which it was for the Lord's glory he should be made sensible of; and therefore he was pleased to leave him to himself. It is the only instance in which he is said to have been left to himself, and the only instance in which his conduct is condemned. I apprehend, that in the state of B, that is, for a season after we have known the Lord, we have usually the most sensible and distressing experiences of our evil natures. I do not say that is necessary that we should be left to fall into gross outward sin, in order to know what is in our hearts; though I believe many have thus fallen, whose hearts, under a former sense of redeeming love, have been as truly set against sin, as the hearts of others who have been preserved from such outward falls. The Lord makes some of his children examples and warnings to others, as he pleases. They who are spared, and whose worst deviations are only known to the Lord and themselves, have great reason to be thankful. I am sure I have: the merciful Lord has not suffered me to make any considerable blot in my profession during the time I have been numbered amongst his people. But I have nothing to boast of herein. It has not been owing to my wisdom, watchfulness, or spirituality, though in the main he has not suffered me to live in the neglect of

his appointed means. But I hope to go softly all my days under the remembrance of many things, for which I have as great cause to be abased before him, as if I had been left to sin grievously in the sight of men. Yet, with respect to my acceptance in the Beloved, I know not if I have had a doubt of a quarter of an hour's continuance for many years past. But, oh! the multiplied instances of stupidity, ingratitude, impatience, and rebellion, to which my conscience has been witness! And as every heart knows its own bitterness, I have generally heard the like complaints from others of the Lord's people with whom I have conversed, even from those who have appeared to be eminently gracious and spiritual. B does not meet with these things perhaps at first, nor every day. The Lord appoints occasions and turns in life, which try our spirits. There are particular seasons, when temptations are suited to our frames, tempers, and situations; and there are times when he is pleased to withdraw, and to permit Satan's approach, that we may feel how vile we are in ourselves. We are prone to spiritual pride, to self-dependence, to vain confidence, to create attachments, and a train of evils. The Lord often discovers to us one single disposition by exposing us to another. He sometimes shows us what he can do for us and in us; and at other times how little we can do, and how unable we are to stand without him. By a variety of these exercises, through the over-ruling and edifying influences of the Holy Spirit, B is trained up in a growing knowledge of himself, and of the Lord. He learns to be more distrustful of his own heart, and to suspect a snare in every step he takes. The dark and disconsolate hours which he has brought upon himself in times past, make him doubly prize the light of God's countenance, and teach him to dread whatever might grieve the Spirit of God, and cause him to withdraw again. The repeated and multiplied pardons which he has received, increase his admiration of, and the sense of his obligations to, the rich, sovereign, abounding mercy of the covenant. Much has been forgiven him, therefore he loves much, and therefore he knows how to forgive and to pity others. He does not call evil good, or good evil; but his own experiences teach him tenderness and forbearance. He experiences a spirit of meekness towards those who are overtaken in a fault, and his attempts

to restore such are according to the pattern of the Lord's dealings with himself. In a word, B's character, in my judgment, is complete, and he becomes a C when the habitual frame of his heart answers to that passage in the prophet Ezekiel, chap. 16:63. "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, (to boast, complain, or censure,) because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God." I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

C, OR, GRACE IN THE FULL CORN IN THE EAR. MARK 4: 28.

DEAR SIR,

By way of distinction, I assigned to A the characteristic of desire, to B that of conflict. I can think of no single word more descriptive of the state of C than contemplation. His eminence, in comparison of A, does not consist in the sensible warmth and fervency of his affections: in this respect, many of the most exemplary believers have looked back with a kind of regret upon the time of their espousals, when, though their judgments were but imperfectly formed, and their views of gospel-truths were very indistinct, they felt a fervor of spirit, the remembrance of which is both humbling and refreshing; and yet they cannot recall the same sensations. Nor is he properly distinguished from B by a consciousness of his acceptance in the Beloved, and an ability of calling God his father; for this I have supposed B has attained to. Though, as there is a growth in every grace, C having had his views of the gospel, and of the Lord's faithfulness and mercy, confirmed by a longer experience, his assurance is of course more stable, and more simple, than when he first saw himself safe from all condemnation. Neither has C, properly speaking, any more strength or stock of grace inherent in himself than B, or even than A. He is in the same state of absolute dependence, as incapable of performing spiritual acts, or of resisting temptations, by his own power, as he was at the first day of his setting out. Yet, in a sense, he is much stronger,

because he has a more feeling and constant sense of his own weakness. The Lord has been long teaching him this lesson, by a train of various dispensations; and through grace he can say, He has not suffered so many things in vain. His heart has deceived him so often, that he is now in a good measure weaned from trusting to it; and therefore he does not meet with so many disappointments. And having found again and again the vanity of all other helps, he is now taught to go to the Lord at once for "grace to help in every time of need." Thus he is strong not in himself, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

But C's happiness and superiority to B lies chiefly in this, that by the Lord's blessing on the use of means, such as prayer, reading, and hearing of the word, and by a sanctified improvement of what he has seen of the Lord, and of his own heart, in the course of his experience, he has attained clearer, deeper, and more comprehensive views of the mystery of redeeming love; of the glorious excellency of the Lord Jesus, in his person, offices, grace, and faithfulness; of the harmony and glory of all the divine perfections manifested in and by him to the church; of the stability, beauty, fulness, and certainty of the holy Scriptures; and of the heights, depths, lengths, and breadths, of the love of God in Christ. Thus, though his sensible feelings may not be so warm as when he was in the state of A, his judgment is more solid, his mind more fixed, his thoughts more habitually exercised upon the things within the veil. His great business is to behold the glory of God in Christ; and by beholding, he is changed into the same image, and brings forth, in an eminent and uniform manner, the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. His contemplations are not barren speculations, but have a real influence, and enable him to exemplify the Christian character to more advantage, and with more consistence, than can, in the present state of things, be expected either from A or B. The following particulars may illustrate my meaning.

1. Humility. A measure of this grace is to be expected in every true Christian; but it can only appear in proportion to the knowledge they have of Christ, and of their own hearts. It is a part of C's daily employment to look back upon the way by which the Lord has led him: and while he

reviews the Ebenezers he has set up all along the road, he sees, in almost an equal number, the monuments of his own perverse returns, and how he has, in a thousand instances, rendered to the Lord evil for good. Comparing these things together, he can, without affectation, adopt the apostle's language, and style himself "less than the least of all saints, and of sinners the chief." A and B know that they ought to be humbled; but C is truly so, and feels the force of that text which I mentioned in my last, Ezek. 16:63. Again, as he knows most of himself, so he has seen most of the Lord. The apprehension of infinite majesty, combined with infinite love, makes him shrink into the dust. From the exercise of this grace he derives two others, which are exceedingly ornamental, and principal branches of the mind which was in Christ.

The one is, submission to the will of God. The views he has of his own vileness, unworthiness, and ignorance, and of the divine sovereignty, wisdom, and love, teach him to be content in every state, and to bear his appointed lot of suffering with resignation, according to the language of David in a time of affliction, "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it."

The other is, tenderness of spirit towards his fellow Christians. He cannot but judge of their conduct according to the rule of the word. But his own heart, and the knowledge he has acquired of the snares of the world, and the subtlety of Satan, teach him to make all due allowances, and qualify him for admonishing and restoring, in the spirit of meekness, those who have been overtaken in a fault. Here A is usually blameable; the warmth of his zeal, not being duly corrected by a sense of his own imperfections, betrays him often into a censorious spirit. But C can bear with A likewise, because he hath been so himself, and he will not expect green fruit to be ripe.

2. Spirituality. A spiritual taste, and a disposition to account all things mean and vain, in comparison of the knowledge of the love of God in Christ, are essential to a true Christian. The world can never be his prevailing choice, 1 John 2:13. Yet we are renewed but in part, and are prone to an undue attachment to worldly things. Our spirits cleave to the dust, in defiance of the dictates of our better judgments; and I believe the Lord seldom gives his

people a considerable victory over this evil principle, until he has let them feel how deeply it is rooted in their hearts. We may often see persons entangled and clogged in this respect, of whose sincerity, in the main, we cannot justly doubt: especially upon some sudden and unexpected turn in life, which brings them into a situation they have not been accustomed to. A considerable part of our trials are mercifully appointed to wean us from this propensity; and it is gradually weakened by the Lord's showing us at one time the vanity of the creature, and at another his own excellence and all-sufficiency. Even C is not perfect in this respect; but he is more sensible of the evil of such attachments, more humbled for them, more watchful against them, and more delivered from them. He still feels a fetter, but he longs to be free. His allowed desires are brought to a point; and he sees nothing worth a serious thought but communion with God and progress in holiness. Whatever outward changes C may meet with, he will, in general, be *the same man* still. He has learned, with the apostle, not only to suffer want, but, which is perhaps the harder lesson, how to abound. A palace would be a prison to him, without the Lord's presence, and with this, a prison would be a palace. From hence arises a peaceful reliance upon the Lord: he has nothing which he cannot commit into his hands, which he is not habitually aiming to resign to his disposal. Therefore he is not afraid of evil tidings; but when the hearts of others shake like the leaves of a tree, he is fixed, trusting in the Lord, who, he believes, can and will make good every loss, sweeten every bitter, and appoint all things to work together for his advantage. He sees that the time is short, lives upon the foretastes of glory, and, therefore, accounts not his life, or any inferior concernment, dear, so that he may finish his course with joy.

3. A union of heart to the glory and will of God, is another noble distinction of C's spirit. The glory of God and the good of his people are inseparably connected. But of these great ends, the first is unspeakably the highest and most important, and into which every thing else will be finally resolved. Now, in proportion as we advance nearer to him, our judgment, aim, and end, will be conformable to his, and his glory will have the highest place in our hearts.

At first it is not so, or but very imperfectly. Our concern is chiefly about ourselves; nor can it be otherwise. The convinced soul inquires, What shall I do to be saved? The young convert is intent upon sensible comforts; and in the seasons when he sees his interest secure, the prospect of the troubles he may meet with in life makes him often wish for an early dismissal, that he may be at rest, and avoid the heat and burden of the day. But C has attained to more enlarged views, he has a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which would be importunate, if he considered only himself; but his chief desire is, that God may be glorified in him, whether by his life or by his death. He is not his own; nor does he desire to be his own; but so that the power of Jesus may be manifested in him, he will take pleasure in infirmities, in distresses, in temptations; and though he longs for heaven, would be content to live as long as Methuselah upon earth, if by any thing he could do or suffer, the will and glory of God might be promoted. And though he loves and adores the Lord for what he has done and suffered for him, delivered him from, and appointed him to; yet he loves and adores him likewise with a more simple and direct love, in which self is in a manner forgot, from the consideration of his glorious excellence and perfections, as he is in himself. That God in Christ is glorious over all, and blessed for ever, is the very joy of his soul; and his heart can frame no higher wish, than that the sovereign, wise, holy, will of God may be accomplished in him, and all his creatures. Upon this grand principle his prayers, schemes, and actions are formed. Thus C is already made like the angels; and, so far as consistent with the inseparable remnants of a fallen nature, the will of God is regarded by him upon earth, as it is by the inhabitants of heaven.

The power of divine grace in C may be exemplified in a great variety of situations. C may be rich or poor, learned or illiterate, of a lively natural spirit, or of a more slow and phlegmatical constitution. He may have a comparatively smooth, or a remarkably thorny path in life; he may be a minister or a layman: these circumstances will give some tincture and difference in appearance to the work; but the work itself is the same; and we must, as far as possible, drop the consideration of them all, or make proper allow-

ances for each, in order to form a right judgment of the life of faith. The outward expression of grace may be heightened and set off to advantage by many things which are merely natural; such as evenness of temper, good sense, a knowledge of the world, and the like: and it may be darkened by things which are not properly sinful, but unavoidable, such as lowness of spirits, weak abilities, and pressure of temptations, which may have effects that they who have not had experience in the same things cannot properly account for. A double quantity of real grace, if I may so speak, that has a double quantity of hindrances to conflict with, will not be easily observed, unless these hindrances are likewise known, and attended to; and a smaller measure of grace may appear great when its exercise meets with no remarkable obstruction. For these reasons we can never be competent judges of each other, because we cannot be competently acquainted with the whole complex case. But our great and merciful High-priest knows the whole; he considers our frame, "remembers that we are but dust;" makes gracious allowances; pities, bears, accepts, and approves, with unerring judgment. The sun, in his daily course, beholds nothing so excellent and honorable upon earth as C, though perhaps he may be confined to a cottage, and is little known or noticed by men. But he is the object and residence of divine love, the charge of angels, and ripening for everlasting glory. Happy C! his toils, sufferings, and exercises will be soon at an end; soon his desires will be accomplished; and he who has loved him, and redeemed him with his own blood, will receive him to himself, with a "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

If this representation is agreeable to the Scriptures, how greatly are they mistaken, and how much to be pitied, who, while they make profession of the gospel, seem to have no idea of the effects it is designed to produce upon the hearts of believers, but either allow themselves in a worldly spirit and conversation, or indulge their unsanctified tempers, by a fierce contention for names, notions, and parties. May the Lord give to you and to me daily to grow in the experience of that wisdom which "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality, and without hypocrisy." I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

ON HEARING SERMONS.

DEAR SIR,

I AM glad to find that the Lord has at length been pleased to fix you in a favored situation, where you have frequent opportunities of hearing the gospel. This is a great privilege; but, like all other outward privileges, it requires grace and wisdom to make a due improvement of it: and the great plenty of ordinances you enjoy, though in itself a blessing, is attended with snares, which, unless they are carefully guarded against, may hinder, rather than promote, your edification. I gladly embrace the occasion you afford me of offering you my advice upon this subject. A remembrance of the mistakes I have myself formerly committed, and the observations I have made upon the conduct of professors, considered as hearers, will, perhaps, in some measure qualify me for the task you have assigned me.

The faithful ministers of the gospel are all the servants and ambassadors of Christ; they are called and furnished by his Holy Spirit; they speak in his name; and their success in the discharge of their office, be it more or less, depends entirely upon his blessing: so far they are all upon a par. But in the measure of their ministerial abilities, and in the peculiar turn of their preaching, there is a great variety. There are "diversities of gifts from the same Spirit; and he distributes to every man severally according to his own will." Some are more happy in alarming the careless, others in administering consolation to the wounded conscience. Some are set more especially for the establishment and confirmation of the gospel-doctrines, others are skilful in solving casuistical points; others are more excellent in enforcing practical godliness; and others again, having been led through depths of temptation and spiritual distress, are best acquainted with the various workings of the heart, and know best how to speak a word in season to weary and exercised souls. Perhaps no true minister of the gospel (for all such are taught of God) is wholly at a loss upon either of these points; but few, if any, are re-

markably and equally excellent in managing them all. Again, as to their manner, some are more popular and pathetic, but at the same time more general and diffuse; while the want of that life and earnestness in delivery is compensated in others by the closeness, accuracy, and depth of their compositions. In this variety of gifts, the Lord has a gracious regard to the different tastes and dispositions, as well as to the wants of his people; and by their combined effects, the complete system of his truth is illustrated, and the good of his church promoted with the highest advantage; while his ministers, like officers assigned to different stations in an army, have not only the good of the whole in view, but each one his particular post to maintain. This would be more evidently the case, if the remaining depravity of our hearts did not afford Satan but too much advantage in his subtle attempts to hurt and ensnare us. But, alas! how often has he prevailed to infuse a spirit of envy or dislike in ministers towards each other, to withdraw hearers from their proper concernment, by dividing them into parties, and stirring them up to contend for a Paul, an Apollos, or a Cephas, for their own favorites, to the disparagement of others who are equally dear to the Lord, and faithful in his service? You may think my preamble long; but I shall deduce my advices chiefly from it; taking it for granted, that to you I may have no need of proving at large what I have advanced.

As the gifts and talents of ministers are different, I advise you to choose for your stated pastor and teacher one whom you find most suitable, upon the whole, to your own taste, and whom you are likely to hear with the most pleasure and advantage. Use some deliberation and much prayer in this matter. Entreat the Lord, who knows better than you do yourself, to guide you where your soul may be best fed; and when your choice is fixed, you will do well to make a point of attending his ministry constantly: I mean, at least the stated times of worship on the Lord's day. I do not say, that no circumstance will justify your going elsewhere at such times occasionally; but I think the seldomer you are absent the better. A stated and regular attendance encourages the minister, affords a good example to the congregation; and a hearer is more likely to meet with what is directly suited to his own case from a minister

who knows him, and expects to see him, than he can be from one who is a stranger. Especially, I would not wish you to be absent for the sake of gratifying your curiosity, to hear some new preacher, who you have, perhaps, been told is a very extraordinary man. For in your way such occasions might possibly offer almost every week. What I have observed of many, who run about unseasonably after new preachers, has reminded me of Prov. 27:8. "As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is the man that wandereth from his place." Such unsettled hearers seldom thrive; they usually grow wise in their own conceits, have their heads filled with notions, acquire a dry, critical, and censorious spirit, and are more intent upon disputing who is the best preacher, than upon obtaining benefit to themselves from what they hear. If you could find a man, indeed, who had a power in himself of dispensing a blessing to your soul, you might follow him from place to place; but as the blessing is in the Lord's hand, you will be more likely to receive it by waiting where his providence has placed you, and where he has met with you before.

But as human nature is prone to extremes, permit me to give you a caution on the other hand. If the minister under whom you statedly attend is made very acceptable to you, you will be in the less danger of slighting him. But be careful that you do not slight any other minister of Christ. If, therefore, when you come to hear your own preacher, you find another in the pulpit, do not let your looks tell him, that if you had known he had been there you would not have come. I wish, indeed, you may never think so in your heart; but though we cannot prevent evil thoughts from rising in our minds, we should endeavor to combat and suppress them. Some persons are so curious, or rather so weak, that if their favorite minister is occasionally absent, they hardly think it worth their while to hear another. A judicious and faithful minister, in this case, instead of being delighted with such a mark of peculiar attachment to himself, will be grieved to think that they have profited no more by his labors; for it is his desire to win souls, not to himself, but to Jesus Christ. I hope you, my friend, will always attend the ordinances with a view to the Lord's presence; and when you are in your proper place, consider the preacher (if he preaches the truth) as one providentially

and expressly sent by the Lord to you at that time; and that you could not choose better for yourself, all things considered, than he has chosen for you. Do not limit the Almighty, by confining your expectations to a single instrument. If you do, you will probably procure your own disappointment. If you fix your hopes upon the man, the Lord may withhold his blessing, and then the best men and the best sermons will prove to you but as clouds without water. But, besides the more stated seasons of worship on the Lord's day, you have many opportunities of hearing sermons occasionally in the course of the week; and thus you may partake of that variety of gifts which I have already spoken of. This will be either a benefit, or otherwise, according to the use you make of it. I would recommend to you to improve these occasions, but under some restrictions.

In the first place, be cautious that you do not degenerate into the spirit of a mere hearer, so as to place the chief stress of your profession upon running hither and thither after preachers. There are many who are always upon the wing: and, without a due regard to what is incumbent upon them in the shop, in the family, or in the closet, they seem to think they were sent into the world only to hear sermons, and to hear as many in a day as they possibly can. Such persons may be fitly compared to Pharaoh's lean kine; they devour a great deal; but, for want of a proper digestion, they do not flourish; their souls are lean; they have little solid comfort; and their profession abounds more in leaves than in fruit. If the twelve apostles were again upon earth, and you could hear them all every week, yet if you were not attentive to the duties of the closet, if you did not allow yourself time for reading, meditation, and prayer; and if you did not likewise conscientiously attend to the concerns of your particular calling, and the discharge of your duties in relative life, I should be more ready to blame your indiscretion, than to admire your zeal. Every thing is beautiful in its season; and if one duty frequently jostle out another, it is a sign either of a weak judgment, or of a wrong turn of mind. No public ordinances can make amends for the neglect of secret prayer; nor will the most diligent attendance upon them justify us in the neglect of

those duties which, by the command and appointment of God, we owe to society.

Again, as it is our trial to live in a day wherein so many contentions and winds of strange doctrines abound, I hope you will watch and pray that you may not have itching ears, inclining you to hearken after novel and singular opinions, and the erroneous sentiments of men of unstable minds, who are not sound in the faith. I have known persons who, from a blameable curiosity, have gone to hear such, not for the sake of edification, which they could not expect, but to know what they had to say, supposing that they themselves were too well established in the truth to be hurt by them. But the experiment (without a just and lawful call) is presumptuous and dangerous. In this way many have been hurt, yea, many have been overthrown. Error is like poison; the subtlety, quickness, and force of its operation, is often amazing. As we pray not to be led into temptation, we should take care not to run into it wilfully. If the Lord has shown you what is right, it is not worth your while to know (if you could know it) how many ways there are of being wrong.

Farther, I advise you, when you hear a gospel sermon, and it is not in all respects to your satisfaction, be not too hasty to lay the whole blame upon the preacher. The Lord's ministers have not much to say in their own behalf. They feel (it is to be hoped) their own weakness and defects, and the greatness and difficulty of their work. They are conscious that their warmest endeavors to proclaim the Saviour's glory are too cold; and their most importunate addresses to the consciences of men are too faint; and sometimes they are burdened with such discouragements, that even their enemies would pity them, if they knew their case. Indeed, they have much to be ashamed of; but it will be more useful for you, who are a hearer, to consider whether the fault may not possibly be in yourself. Perhaps you thought too highly of the man, and expected too much from him; or perhaps you thought too meanly of him, and expected too little. In the former case, the Lord justly disappointed you; in the latter, you received according to your faith. Perhaps you neglected to pray for him; and then, though he might be useful to others, it is not at all

strange that he was not so to you. Or possibly you have indulged a trifling spirit, and brought a dearth and deadness upon your own soul, for which you had not been duly humbled, and the Lord chose that time to rebuke you.

Lastly, as a hearer, you have a right to try all doctrines by the word of God; and it is your duty so to do. Faithful ministers will remind you of this; they will not wish to hold you in an implicit and blind obedience to what they say upon their own authority, nor desire that you should follow them farther than they have the Scriptures for their warrant. They would not be lords over your conscience, but helpers of your joy. Prize this gospel-liberty, which sets you free from the doctrines and commandments of men; but do not abuse it to the purposes of pride and self. There are hearers who make themselves, and not the Scripture, the standard of their judgment. They attend not so much to be instructed, as to pass their sentence. To them the pulpit is the bar at which the minister stands to take his trial before them,—a bar at which few escape censure, from judges at once so severe and inconsistent. For as these censors are not all of a mind, and, perhaps, agree in nothing so much as in the opinion they have of their own wisdom, it has often happened, that, in the course of one and the same sermon, the minister has been condemned as a legalist, and an antinomian; as too high in his notions, and too low; as having too little action, and too much. Oh! this is a hateful spirit, that prompts hearers to pronounce *ex cathedra*, as if they were infallible, breaks in upon the rights of private judgment, even in matters not essential, and makes a man an offender for a word. This spirit is one frequent unhappy evil, which springs from the corruption of the heart, when the Lord affords the means of grace in great abundance. How highly would some of the Lord's hidden ones, who are destitute of the ordinances, prize the blessing of a preached gospel, with which too many professors seem to be surfeited. I pray God to preserve you from such a spirit, (which, I fear, is spreading, and infects us like the pestilence,) and to guide you in all things.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

ON TEMPTATION.

DEAR SIR,

WHAT can you expect from me on the subject of temptation, with which you have been so much more conversant than myself? On this point I am more disposed to receive information from you, than to offer my advice. You, by the Lord's appointment, have had much business and exercise on these great waters; whereas the knowledge I have of what passes there, I have gained more from observation than from actual experience. I shall not wonder if you think I write like a novice; however, your request has the force of a command with me. I shall give you my thoughts, or rather shall take occasion to write, not so much to you as to others, who, though they may be plunged in the depths of temptation, have not yet seen so much of the wisdom and power of God in these dispensations as yourself. I shall first inquire, why the Lord permits some of his people to suffer such violent assaults from the powers of darkness; and then suggest a few advices to tempted souls.

The temptations of Satan (which, though not the most painful, are in reality the most dangerous) do not directly belong to my present design. I mean those by which he is too successful in drawing many professors from the path of duty, in filling them with spiritual pride, or lulling them into carnal security. In these attempts, he is often most powerful and prevalent when he is least perceived. He seldom distresses those whom he can deceive. It is chiefly when these endeavors fail that he fights against the peace of the soul. He hates the Lord's people, grudges them all their privileges and their comforts, and will do what he can to disquiet them, because he cannot prevail against them. And though the Lord sets such bounds to his rage as he cannot pass, and limits him both as to manner and time, he is often pleased to suffer him to discover his malice to a considerable degree; not to gratify Satan, but to humble and prove them; to show them what is in their hearts; to make them truly sensible of their immediate and absolute dependence upon himself, and to quicken them to watch-

fulness and prayer. Though temptations, in their own nature, are grievous and dreadful, yet when, by the grace of God, they are productive of these effects, they deserve to be numbered among the "all things" which are appointed to work together for the good of those who love him. The light carriage, vain confidence, and woful backslidings of many professors, might, perhaps, (speaking after the manner of men,) have been in some measure prevented, had they been more acquainted with this spiritual warfare, and had they drunk of the cup of temptation, which but few of those who walk humbly and uprightly are exempted from tasting of, though not all in the same degree. One gracious end, therefore, that the Lord has in permitting his people to be tempted, is for the prevention of greater evils, that they may not grow proud or careless, or be ensnared by the corrupt customs of the world. In this view, I doubt not, however burdensome your trials may at some seasons prove, you are enabled, by your composed judgment, to rejoice in them, and be thankful for them. You know what you suffer now; but you know not what might have been the consequence if you had never smarted by the fiery darts of the wicked one. You might have been taken in a more fatal snare, and been numbered with those who, by their grievous declensions and falls, have caused the ways of truth to be evil spoken of.

Another design is, for the manifestation of his power, and wisdom, and grace, in supporting the soul under such pressures as are evidently beyond its own strength to sustain. A bush on fire, and not consumed, engaged the attention of Moses. This emblem is generally applicable to the state of a Christian in the present life; but never more so than when he is in the fire of temptation. And though his heaviest sufferings of this kind are usually hidden from the notice of his fellow-creatures, yet there are other eyes always upon him. "We are," says the apostle, "a spectacle to the world;" not only to men, but to angels also. Many things probably pass in the invisible state, in which we have a nearer concernment than we are ordinarily aware of. The beginning of the book of Job throws some light upon this point, and informs us (of which we should have been otherwise totally ignorant) of the true source of his

uncommon sufferings. Satan had challenged him, charged him as a hypocrite, and thought he was able to prove him one, if he could have permission to attack him. The Lord, for the vindication of Job's integrity, and for the manifestation of his own faithfulness and power in favor of his servant, was pleased to give Satan leave to try what he could do. The experiment answered many good purposes; Job was humbled, yet approved; his friends were instructed; Satan was confuted and disappointed; and the wisdom and mercy of the Lord, in his darkest dispensations towards his people, were gloriously illustrated. This contest, and the event, were recorded for the direction and encouragement of his church to the end of time. Satan's malice is not abated; and though he has met with millions of disappointments, he still, like Goliath of old, defies the armies of God's Israel; he challenges the stoutest, and "desires to have them, that he may sift them as wheat." Indeed he is far an overmatch for them, considered as in themselves; but though they are weak, their Redeemer is mighty, and they are forever secured by his love and intercession. "The Lord knows them that are his," and no weapon formed against them can prosper. That this may appear with the fullest evidence, Satan is allowed to assault them. We handle vessels of glass or china with caution, and endeavor to preserve them from falls and blows, because we know they are easily broken. But if a man had the art of making glass malleable, and, like iron, capable of bearing the stroke of a hammer without breaking, it is probable, that instead of locking it carefully up, he would rather, for the commendation of his skill, permit many to attempt to break it, when he knew their attempts would be in vain. Believers are compared to earthen vessels, liable in themselves to be destroyed by a small blow; but they are so strengthened and tempered by the power and supply of divine grace, that the fiercest efforts of their fiercest enemies against them may be compared to the dashing of waves against a rock. And that this may be known and noticed, they are exposed to many trials; but the united and repeated assaults of the men of the world, and the powers of darkness, afford but the more incontestible demonstration that the Lord is with them of a truth, and that his strength is made perfect in

their weakness. Surely this thought, my friend, will afford you consolation; and you will be content to suffer, if God may be glorified by you and in you.

Farther, by enduring temptation, you, as a living member of the body of Christ, have the honor of being conformed to your head. He suffered, being tempted; and because he loves you, he calls you to a participation of his sufferings, and to taste of his cup; not the cup of the wrath of God; this he drank alone, and he drank it all. But in affliction he allows his people to have fellowship with him. Thus they fill up the measure of his sufferings, and can say, "As he was, so are we in the world." Marvel not that the world hates you, neither marvel that Satan rages against you. Should not the disciple be as his Lord? Can the servant expect or desire peace from the avowed enemies of his Master? We are to follow his steps; and can we wish, if it were possible, to walk in a path strewn with flowers, when his was strewn with thorns? Let us be in nothing terrified by the power of our adversaries, which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to us of salvation, and that of God. To us it is given, not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. If we would make peace with the world, the world would let us alone; if we would be content to walk in the ways of sin, Satan would give us no disturbance; but because grace has rescued us from his dominion, and the love of Jesus constrains us to live to him alone, therefore the enemy, like a lion robbed of his prey, roars against us. He roars, but he cannot devour; he plots and rages, but he cannot prevail; he disquiets, but he cannot destroy. If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him. In due time he will bruise Satan under our feet, make us more than conquerors, and place us where we shall hear the voice of war no more for ever.

Again, as by temptations we are conformed to the life of Christ, so likewise, by the sanctifying power of grace, they are made subservient to advance our conformity to his image; particularly as we thereby acquire a sympathy and fellow-feeling with our suffering brethren. This is eminently a branch of the mind that was in Christ. He knows how to pity and help those who are tempted, because he has been tempted himself. He knows what temptations

mean, not only with that knowledge whereby he knows all things, but by experience. He well remembers what he endured in the wilderness and in the garden; and though it is for his glory and our comfort that he suffered temptation without sin, yet for that very reason, and because he was perfectly holy, the temptations of Satan were unspeakably more bitter to him than they can be to us. The great duty and refuge of the tempted now is, to apply to him, and they have the highest encouragement to do so, in that they are assured he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. And, for the like reason, they find some consolation in applying to those of their brethren who have suffered the same things. None but these can either understand or pity their complaints. If the Lord has any children who are not exercised with spiritual temptations, I am sure they are but poorly qualified to "speak a word in season to them that are weary." In this school you have acquired the tongue of the learned; and let it not seem a small thing to you, if the Lord has given you wisdom and ability to comfort the afflicted ones. If your prayers, your conversation, and the knowledge they have of your trials, afford them some relief in a dark hour, this is an honor and a privilege which I am persuaded you will think you have not purchased too dear by all that you have endured.

Once more, temptations, by giving us a painful sensibility of the weakness of our graces, and the strength of our inward corruptions, tend to mortify the evil principles of self-dependence and self-righteousness, which are so deeply rooted in our fallen nature; to make Christ, in all his relations, offices, and characters, more precious to us; and to convince us, that without him we can do nothing. It would be easy to enlarge upon these and other advantages which the Lord enables his people to derive from the things which they suffer; so that they may say with Samson, "Out of the eater comes forth meat;" and that what their adversary designs for their overthrow, contributes to their establishment. But I have already exceeded my limits. Enough I hope has been said to prove that he has wise and gracious ends in permitting them, for a season, to be tossed with tempest, and not comforted. Ere long these designs will be more fully unfolded to us, and we shall be satisfied that he has done all things well. In the mean while it is

our duty, and will be much for our comfort, to believe it upon the authority of his word.

I should now proceed to offer some advices to those who are tempted; but I am ready to say, To what purpose? When the enemy comes in like a flood; when the very foundations of hope are attacked; when suspicions are raised in the mind, not only concerning an interest in the promises, but concerning the truth of the Scripture itself; when a dark cloud blots out not only the sense, but almost the remembrance of past comforts; when the mind is overwhelmed with torrents of blasphemous, unclean, or monstrous imaginations; things horrible and unutterable; when the fiery darts of Satan have set the corruptions of the heart in a flame; at such a season a person is little disposed or able to listen to advice. I shall, however, mention some things by which ordinarily Satan maintains his advantage against them in these circumstances, that they may be upon their guard as much as possible.

His principal devices are:

1. To hide from them the Lord's designs in permitting him thus to rage. Some of these I have noticed; and they should endeavor to keep them upon their minds. It is hard for them, during the violence of the storm, to conceive that any good can possibly arise from the experience of so much evil. But when the storm is over, they find that the Lord is still mindful of them. Now, though a young soldier may well be startled at the first onset in the field of battle, it seems possible, that those who have been often engaged should at length gain confidence, from the recollection of the many instances in which they have formerly found, by the event, that the Lord was surely with them in like difficulties, and that their fears were only groundless and imaginary. When the warfare is hottest, they have still reason to say, "Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him."

2. To make them utter impatient speeches, which do but aggravate their distress. It is said of Job, under his first trials, "In all this he sinned not with his lips, nor charged God foolishly." So long Satan was unable to prevail. Afterwards he opened his mouth, as Jeremiah did likewise, and cursed the day of his birth. When he once began to complain, his causes of complaint increased. We cannot

prevent dreadful thoughts from arising in our hearts; but we should be cautious of giving them vent by speaking unadvisedly. This is like letting in wind upon a smothering fire, which will make it burn more fiercely.

3. To persuade them that all they feel and tremble at arises immediately from their own hearts. Indeed, it is a most awful proof of our depravity, that we feel something within ready to close with the suggestions of the enemy, in defiance of our better judgment and desires. But it is not so in all cases. It is not always easy, nor is it needful, exactly to draw the line between the temptations of Satan and our own corruptions; but sometimes it is not impossible to distinguish them. When a child of God is tempted to blaspheme the name that he adores, or to commit such evils as even unsanctified nature would recoil at, the enemy has done it, and shall be answerable for the whole guilt. The soul, in this case, is passive, and suffers with extreme reluctance what it more dreads than the greatest evils which can affect the body. Nor do the deepest wounds of this kind leave a scar upon the conscience when the storm is over; which is a proof that they are not our own act.

4. To drive them from the throne of grace. Prayer, which is at all times necessary, is especially so in a time of temptation. But how hard is it to come boldly, that we may obtain help in this time of need! But, however hard, it must be attempted. By discontinuing prayer, we give the enemy the greatest encouragement possible; for then he sees that his temptations have the effect which he intends by them, to intercept us from our strong hold. When our Lord was in an agony, he prayed the most earnestly; the ardor of his prayer increased with the distress of his soul. It would be happy if we could always imitate him in this; but too often temptations and difficulties, instead of rousing our application, dishearten and enfeeble us; so that our cries are the faintest when we stand most in need of assistance. But so long as prayer is restrained, our burden is increased, Psalm 32:3.5. If he cannot make them omit praying, he will repeatedly endeavor to weary them, by working upon the legality which cleaves so close to the heart. Satan is a hard task-master when he interferes in the performance of our spiritual duties. This he does, perhaps, more frequently than we think of; for he can, if it serves his pur-

pose, appear as an angel of light. When the soul is in a tempest, and attempts to pray, he will suggest that prayer on these occasions should be protracted to such a length, and performed with such steadiness, as is found to be at that season quite impracticable. Such constrained efforts are wearisome; and, from the manner of the performance, he takes occasion to fix fresh guilt upon the conscience. Short, frequent, and fervent petitions, which will almost necessarily arise from what is felt when temptation is violent, are best suited to the case; and we need not add to the burden, by tasking ourselves beyond our power, as if we expected to be heard for our much speaking. Blessed be God that we fight with an enemy already vanquished by our Lord, and that we have a sure promise of victory. The Lord is our banner. I am, &c.

LETTER XV.

A PLAN OF A COMPENDIOUS CHRISTIAN LIBRARY.

DEAR SIR,

AN eager desire of reading many books, though it is often supposed to be the effect of a taste for knowledge, is, perhaps, a principal cause of detaining multitudes in ignorance and perplexity. When an unexperienced person thus ventures into the uncertain tide of opinions, he is liable to be hurried hither and thither with the changing stream, to fall in with every new proposal, and to be continually embarrassed with the difficulty of distinguishing between probability and truth. Or if, at last, he happily finds a clue to lead him through the labyrinth, wherein so many have been lost, he will acknowledge, upon a review, that, from what he remembers to have read, (for perhaps the greater part he has wholly forgotten,) he has gained little more than a discovery of what mistakes, uncertainty, insignificance, acrimony, and presumption, are often obtruded on the world under the disguise of a plausible title-page.

It is far from my intention to depreciate the value, or deny the usefulness of books, without exception: a few well chosen treatises, carefully perused, and thoroughly digested,

will deserve and reward our pains; but a multiplicity of reading is seldom attended with a good effect. Besides the confusion it often brings upon the judgment and memory, it occasions a vast expense of time, indisposes for close thinking, and keeps us poor, in the midst of seeming plenty, by reducing us to live upon a foreign supply, instead of laboring to improve and increase the stock of our own reflections.

Every branch of knowledge is attended with this inconvenience; but it is in no-one more sensibly felt than when the inquiry is directed to the subject of religion. Perhaps no country has abounded so much with religious books as our own; many of them are truly excellent; but a very great number of those which are usually more obvious to be met with, as they stand recommended by great names, and the general taste of the public, are more likely to mislead an inquirer, than to direct him into the paths of true peace and wisdom.

And even in those books which are in the main agreeable to the word of God, there is often so great a mixture of human infirmity, so much of the spirit of controversy and party, such manifest defects in some, and so many unwarrantable additions to the simple truth of the gospel in others, that unless a person's judgment is already formed, or he has a prudent friend to direct his choice, he will probably be led into error or prejudice before he is aware, by his attachment to a favorite author.

Allowing, therefore, the advantage of a discreet and seasonable use of human writings, I would point out a still more excellent way for the acquisition of true knowledge: a method which, if wholly neglected, the utmost diligence in the use of every other means will prove ineffectual; but which, if faithfully pursued in an humble dependence upon the divine blessing, will not only of itself lead us by the straightest path to wisdom, but will also give a double efficacy to every subordinate assistance.

If I may be allowed to use the term book in a metaphorical sense, I may say that the most high God, in condescension to the weakness of our faculties, the brevity of our lives, and our many avocations, has comprised all the knowledge conducive to our real happiness in four comprehensive volumes. The first, which may be considered as

the text, is cheap, portable, and compendious, so that hardly any person in our favored land, who is apprised of its worth, need be without it; and the other three, which are the best and fullest commentaries upon this, are always at hand for our perusal, and pressing upon our attention in every place and circumstance of our lives.

It will be easily apprehended, that by the first book, or volume, I mean that perfect and infallible system of truth, the Bible. The internal characters of this book, arising from its comprehensiveness, simplicity, majesty, and authority, sufficiently prove to every enlightened mind that it is given by inspiration of God. They who are competent judges of this evidence are no more disturbed by the suggestions of some men, reputed wise, that it is of human composition, than if they were told that men had invented the sun, and placed it in the firmament. Its fulness speaks its author. No case has yet occurred, or ever will, for which there is not a sufficient provision made in this invaluable treasury. Here we may seek (and we shall not seek in vain) wherewith to combat and vanquish every error. to illustrate and confirm every spiritual truth. Here are promises suited to every want, directions adapted to every doubt that can possibly arise. Here is milk for babes, meat for strong men, medicines for the wounded, refreshment for the weary. The general history of all nations and ages, and the particular experience of each private believer, from the beginning to the end of time, are wonderfully comprised in this single volume; so that whoever reads, and improves it aright, may discover his state, his progress, his temptations, his danger, and his duty, as distinctly and minutely marked out, as if the whole had been written for him alone. In this respect, as well as in many others, great is the mystery of godliness:

The simplicity, as well as the subject-matter of the Bible, evinces its divine original. Though it has depths sufficient to embarrass and confound the proudest efforts of unsanctified reason, it does not, as to its general import, require an elevated genius to understand it, but is equally addressed to the level of every capacity. As its contents are of universal concernment, they are proposed in such a manner as to engage and satisfy the inquiries of all; and the learned, with respect to their own personal interest,

have no advantage above the ignorant. That it is in fact read by many who receive no instruction or benefit from it, is wholly owing to their inattention or vanity. This event may rather excite grief than wonder. The Bible teaches us to expect it. It forewarns us that the natural man cannot receive the things of God, can neither understand nor approve them. It points out to us the necessity of a heavenly teacher, the Holy Spirit, who has promised to guide those who seek him by prayer into all necessary truth. They who implore his assistance find the seals opened, the veil taken away, and the way of salvation made plain before them.

The language of the Bible is likewise clothed with inimitable majesty and authority. God speaks in it, and reveals the glory of his perfections, his sovereignty, holiness, justice, goodness, and grace, in a manner worthy of himself, though, at the same time, admirably adapted to our weakness. The most labored efforts of human genius are flat and languid, in comparison of those parts of the Bible which are designed to give us due apprehensions of the God with whom we have to do. Where shall we find such instances of the true sublime, the great, the marvellous, the beautiful, the pathetic, as in the holy Scriptures? Again, the effects which it performs demonstrate it to be the word of God. With a powerful and penetrating energy it alarms and pierces the conscience, discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart, convinces the most obstinate, and makes the most careless tremble. With equal authority and efficacy it speaks peace to the troubled mind, heals the wounded spirit, and can impart a joy unspeakable and full of glory in the midst of the deepest distress. It teaches, persuades, comforts, and reproves, with an authority that can neither be disputed nor evaded; and often communicates more light, motives, and influence, by a single sentence, to a plain unlettered believer, than he could derive from all the voluminous commentaries of the learned. In a word, it answers the character the apostle gives of it: "It is able to make us wise unto salvation; it is completely and alone sufficient to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished for every good work." The doctrines, histories, prophecies, promises, precepts, exhortations, examples, and warnings, contained in the Bible, form a perfect whole, a

complete summary of the will of God concerning us, in which nothing is wanting, nothing is superfluous.

The second volume which deserves our study is the book of Creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy-work;" nor can we cast our eyes any where without meeting innumerable proofs of his wisdom, power, goodness, and presence. God is revealed in the least, as well as in the greatest of his works. The sun and the glow-worm, the fabric of the universe, and each single blade of grass, are equally the effects of divine power. The lines of this book, though very beautiful and expressive in themselves, are not immediately legible by fallen man. The works of creation may be compared to a fair character in cypher, of which the Bible is the key: and without this key they cannot be understood. This book was always open to the Heathens; but they could not read it, nor discern the proofs of his eternal power and godhead which it affords. "They became vain in their own imaginations, and worshipped the creature more than the Creator." The case is much the same at this day with many reputed wise, whose hearts are not subjected to the authority of the Bible. The study of the works of God, independent of his word, though dignified with the name of philosophy, is no better than an elaborate trifling and waste of time. It is to be feared none are more remote from the true knowledge of God, than many of those who value themselves most upon their supposed knowledge of his creatures. They may speak in general terms of his wisdom; but they live without him in the world; and their philosophy cannot teach them either to love, or serve, to fear, or trust him. They who know God in his word, may find both pleasure and profit tracing his wisdom in his works, if their inquiries are kept within due bounds, and in a proper subservience to things of greater importance; but they are comparatively few who have leisure, capacity, or opportunity, for these inquiries. But the book of creation is designed for the instruction of all believers. If they are not qualified to be astronomers or anatomists, yet, from a view of the heavens, the work of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, which he hath created, they learn to conceive of his condescension, power, and faithfulness. Though they are unacquainted with the theory of light and colors,

they can see in the rainbow a token of God's covenant-love. Perhaps they have no idea of the magnitude or distance of the sun; but it reminds them of Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, the source of light and life to their souls. The Lord has established a wonderful analogy between the natural and the spiritual world. This is a secret only known to them that fear him; but they contemplate it with pleasure; and almost every object they see, when they are in a right frame of mind, either leads their thoughts to Jesus, or tends to illustrate some spiritual truth or promise. This is the best method of studying the book of Nature, and for this purpose it is always open and plain to those who love the Bible, so that he who runs may read.

The book of Providence is the third volume by which those who fear the Lord are instructed. This likewise is inextricable and unintelligible to the wisest of men who are not governed by the word of God. But when the principles of Scripture are admitted and understood, they throw a pleasing light upon the study of divine providence, and, at the same time, are confirmed and illustrated by it. What we read in the Bible of the sovereignty, wisdom, power, omniscience, and omnipresence, of God, of his over-ruling all events to the accomplishment of his counsels, and the manifestation of his glory, of the care he maintains of his church and people, and of his attention to their prayers, is exemplified by the history of nations and families, and the daily occurrences of private life. The believer receives hourly and indubitable proofs that the Lord reigns; that verily there is a God that judges in the earth. Hence arises a solid confidence: he sees that his concerns are in safe hands; and he needs not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord, while others live at an uncertainty, exposed to the impressions of every new appearance; and, like a ship in a storm, without rudder or pilot, abandoned to the power of the winds and waves. In the history of Joseph, and in the book of Esther, and indeed throughout the Bible, we have specimens of the wise unerring providence of God; what important consequences depend, under his management, upon the smallest events; and with what certainty seeming contingencies are directed to the issue which he has appointed. By these authentic specimens we learn to judge of the whole; and with still

greater advantage by the light of the New Testament, which shows us that the administration of all power, in heaven and earth, is in the hands of Jesus. The government is upon his shoulders: The King of saints is King of nations, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor a hair from our heads, without his cognizance. And though his ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts; though his agency is veiled from the eye of sense by the intervention of second causes, yet faith perceives, acknowledges, admires, and trusts his management. This study, like the former, does not require superior natural abilities, but is obvious to the weakest and meanest of his people, so far as their own duty and peace are concerned.

The fourth volume is the book of the Heart, or of Human Nature, comprehending the experience of what passes within our own breasts, and the observations we make upon the principles and conduct of others, compared with what we read in the word of God! The heart of man is deep; but all its principles and workings, in every possible situation, and the various manners in which it is affected by sin, by Satan, by worldly objects, and by grace, in solitude and in company, in prosperity and in affliction, are disclosed and unfolded in the Scriptures. Many who are proud of their knowledge of what they may be safely ignorant of, are utter strangers to themselves. Having no acquaintance with the Scriptures, they have neither skill nor inclination to look into their own hearts, nor any certain criterion whereby to judge of the conduct of human life. But the Bible teaches us to read this mysterious book also; shows us the source, nature, and tendency of our hopes, fears, desires, pursuits, and perplexities; the reasons why we cannot be happy in ourselves, and the vanity and insufficiency of every thing around us to help us. The rest and happiness proposed in the gospel is likewise found to be exactly suitable to the desires and necessities of the awakened heart; and the conduct of those who reject this salvation, as well as the gracious effects produced in those who receive it, prove to a demonstration that the word of God is indeed a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

My limits will admit of but a few hints upon these ex-

tensive subjects. I shall only observe, that whoever is well read in these four books is a wise person, how little soever he may know of what the men of the world call science. On the other hand, though a man should be master of the whole circle of classical, polite, and philosophical knowledge, if he has no taste for the Bible, and has no ability to apply it to the works of creation and providence, and his own experience, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. I have pointed out a treasure of more worth than all the volumes in the Vatican.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

ON THE INEFFICACY OF OUR KNOWLEDGE.

DEAR SIR,

To be enabled to form a clear, consistent, and comprehensive judgment of the truths revealed in the Scriptures is a great privilege: but they who possess it are exposed to the temptation of thinking too highly of themselves, and too meanly of others, especially of those who not only refuse to adopt their sentiments, but venture to oppose them. We see few controversial writings, however excellent in other respects, but are tinctured with this spirit of self-superiority; and they who are not called to this service, if they are attentive to what passes in their hearts, may feel it working within them upon a thousand occasions; though, so far as it prevails, it brings forcibly home to ourselves the charge of ignorance and inconsistency, which we are so ready to fix upon our opponents. I know nothing as a means more likely to correct this evil, than a serious consideration of the amazing difference between our acquired judgment and our actual experience; or, in other words, how little influence our knowledge and judgment have upon our own conduct. This may confirm to us the truth and propriety of the apostle's observation, "If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Not that we are bound to be insensible that the Lord has taught us what we were once ignorant of; nor is

it possible that we should be so, but because, if we estimate our knowledge by its effects, and value it no farther than it is experimental and operative, (which is the proper standard whereby to try it,) we shall find it so faint and feeble as hardly to deserve the name.

How firmly, for instance, are we persuaded, in our judgments, that God is omnipresent. Great as the difficulties may be which attend our conceptions of this point, the truth itself is controverted by few. It is generally acknowledged by unawakened persons; and, I may add, too frequently known even by believers, as if they knew it not. If the eyes of the Lord are in every place, how strong a guard should this thought be upon the conduct of those who profess to fear him! We know how we are often affected when in the presence of a fellow-worm; if he is one on whom we depend, or who is considerably our superior in life, how careful are we to compose our behavior, and to avoid whatever might be deemed improper or offensive! Is it not strange, that those who have taken their ideas of the divine majesty, holiness, and purity, from the Scriptures, and are not wholly insensible of their inexpressible obligations to regulate all they say or do by his precepts, should, upon many occasions, be betrayed into improprieties of behavior, from which the presence of a nobleman, or a prince, would have effectually restrained them; yea, sometimes, perhaps, even the presence of a child? Even in the exercise of prayer, by which we profess to draw near the Lord, the consideration that his eye is upon us has little power to engage our attention, or prevent our thoughts from wandering, like the fool's eyes, to the ends of the earth. What should we think of a person, who, being admitted into the king's presence, upon business of the greatest importance, should break off in the midst of his address to pursue a butterfly? Could such an instance of weakness be met with, it would be but a faint emblem of the inconsistencies which they who are acquainted with their own hearts can often charge themselves with in prayer. They are not wholly ignorant in what a frame of spirit it becomes a needy dependent sinner to approach that God, before whom angels are represented as vailing their faces; yet, in defiance of their better judgment, their attention is diverted from him with whom they have to do to the merest trifles: they are not

able to realize that presence with which they believe themselves to be surrounded, but speak as if they were speaking to the air. Further, if our sense that God is always present was in any good measure answerable to the conviction of our judgment, would it not be an effectual preservative from the many importunate, though groundless, fears with which we are harassed! He says, "Fear not, I am with thee:" he promises to be a shield and a guard to those who put their trust in him; yet, though we profess to believe his word, and to hope that he is our protector, we seldom think ourselves safe, even in the path of duty, a moment longer than danger is kept out of our view. Little reason have we to value ourselves upon our knowledge of this indisputable truth, when it has no more effective and habitual influence upon our conduct.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty likewise, though not so generally owned as the former, is no less fully assented to by those who are called Calvinists. We zealously contend for this point in our debates with the Arminians, and are ready to wonder that any should be hardy enough to dispute the Creator's right to do what he will with his own. While we are only engaged in defence of the election of grace, and have a comfortable hope that we are ourselves of that number, we seem so convinced, by the arguments Scripture affords us in support of this truth, that we can hardly forbear charging our adversaries with perverse obstinacy and pride for opposing it. Undoubtedly the ground of this opposition lies in the pride of the human heart; but this evil principle is not confined to any party; and occasions frequently arise, when they who contend for the divine sovereignty are little more practically influenced by it than their opponents. This humiliating doctrine concludes as strongly for submission to the will of God, under every circumstance of life, as it does for our acquiescing in his purpose to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. But, alas! how often do we find ourselves utterly unable to apply it, so as to reconcile our spirits to those afflictions which he is pleased to allot us. So far as we are enabled to say, when we are exercised with poverty, or heavy losses or crosses, "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it," so far, and no farther, are we truly convinced that God has a sovereign right to dispose of us,

and all our concernments, as he pleases. How often, and how justly, at such seasons, might the argument we offer to others, as sufficient to silence all their objections, be retorted upon ourselves: "Nay, but who art thou, O man, who repliest against God! Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"—a plain proof that our knowledge is more notional than experimental. What an inconsistency, that while we think God is just and righteous in withholding from others the things which pertain to their everlasting peace, we should find it so hard to submit to his dispensations to ourselves in matters of unspeakably less importance!

But the Lord's appointments, to those who fear him, are not only sovereign, but wise and gracious. He has connected their good with his own glory, and is engaged, by promise, to make all things work together for their advantage. He chooses for his people better than they could choose for themselves. If they are in heaviness, there is a need-be for it, and he withholds nothing from them but what, upon the whole, it is better they should be without. Thus the Scriptures teach, and thus we profess to believe. Furnished with these principles, we are at no loss to suggest motives of patience and consolation to our brethren that are afflicted. We can assure them, without hesitation, that if they are interested in the promises, their concerns are in safe hands; that the things which at present are not joyous, but grievous, shall in due season yield the peaceful fruits of righteousness, and that their trials are as certainly mercies as their comforts. We can prove to them, from the history of Joseph, David, Job, and other instances recorded in Scripture, that, notwithstanding any present dark appearances, it shall certainly be well with the righteous; that God can and will make crooked things straight; and that he often produces the greatest good from those events which we are apt to look upon as evil. From hence we can infer, not only the sinfulness, but the folly, of finding fault with any of his dispensations. We can tell them, that, at the worst, the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed; and that, therefore, under the greatest pressures, they should so weep as those who expect, in a little time, to have all their tears wiped away. But when the case is our

own, when we are troubled on every side, or touched in the tenderest part, how difficult is it to feel the force of these reasonings, though we know they are true to a demonstration? Then, unless we are endued with fresh strength from on high, we are as liable to complain and despond, as if we thought our afflictions sprung out of the ground, and that the Lord had forgotten to be gracious.

I might proceed to show the difference between our judgment, when most enlightened, and our actual experience with respect to every spiritual truth. We know there is no proportion between time and eternity, between God and the creature, the favor of the Lord and the favor or the frowns of men; and yet often, when these things are brought into close competition, we are sorely put to it to keep steadfast in the path of duty; nay, without new supplies of grace, we should certainly fail in the time of trial, and our knowledge would have no other effect than to render our guilt more inexcusable. We seem to be as sure that we are weak, sinful, fallible creatures, as we are that we exist; and yet we are prone to act as if we were wise and good. In a word, we cannot deny that a great part of our knowledge is as I have described it, like the light of the moon, destitute of heat and influence; and yet we can hardly help thinking of ourselves too highly upon the account of it.

May we not say with the psalmist, "Lord, what is man!" yea, what an enigma, what a poor inconsistent creature, is a believer? In one view, how great are his character and privileges! He knows the Lord; he knows himself. His understanding is enlightened to apprehend and contemplate the great mysteries of the gospel. He has just ideas of the evil of sin, the vanity of the world, the beauties of holiness, and the nature of true happiness. He was once darkness, but now he is light in the Lord. He has access to God by Jesus Christ, to whom he is united, and in whom he lives by faith. While the principles he has received are enlivened by the agency of the Holy Spirit, he can do all things. He is humble, gentle, patient, watchful, faithful. He rejoices in afflictions, triumphs over temptation, lives upon the foretastes of eternal glory, and counts not his life dear, so he may glorify God his Saviour, and finish his course with joy. But his strength is not his own; he is

absolutely dependent, and is still encompassed with infirmities, and burdened with a depraved nature. If the Lord withdraws his power, he becomes weak as another man, and drops, as a stone sinks to the earth by its own weight. His inherent knowledge may be compared to the windows of a house, which can transmit the light, but cannot retain it. Without renewed and continual communications from the Spirit of grace, he is unable to withstand the smallest temptation, to endure the slightest trial, to perform the least service in a due manner, or even to think a good thought. He knows this, and yet he too often forgets it. But the Lord reminds him of it frequently, by suspending that assistance, without which he can do nothing. Then he feels what he is, and is easily prevailed upon to act in contradiction to his better judgment. Thus repeated experience of his own weakness teaches him, by degrees, where his strength lies: that it is not in any thing that he has already attained, or can call his own, but in the grace, power, and faithfulness of his Saviour. He learns to cease from his own understanding, to be ashamed of his best endeavors, to abhor himself in dust and ashes, and to glory only in the Lord.

From hence we may observe, that believers who have most knowledge are not, therefore, necessarily the most spiritual. Some may, and do, walk more honorably and more comfortably with two talents, than others with five. He who experimentally knows his own weakness, and depends simply upon the Lord, will surely thrive, though his acquired attainments and abilities may be but small; and he who has the greatest gifts, the clearest judgment, and the most extensive knowledge, if he indulges high thoughts of his advantages, is in imminent danger of mistaking and falling at every step; for the Lord will suffer none whom he loves to boast in themselves. He will guide the meek with his eye, and fill the hungry with good things; but the rich he sendeth away empty. It is an invariable maxim in his kingdom, that whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVII.

ON A BELIEVER'S FRAMES.

DEAR SIR,

You ask me, in your letter, What one should do when he finds himself always still, quiet, and stupid, except in the pulpit, when he is made useful there, but cannot get either comfort or sorrow out of it, or but very rarely? You describe a case which my own experience has made very familiar to me: I shall therefore take the occasion to offer you a few miscellaneous thoughts upon the subject of a believer's frames; and I send them to you, not by post, but from the press; because I apprehend the exercise you speak of is not peculiar to you or to me, but is, in a greater or less degree, the burden of all who are spiritually minded, and duly attentive to what passes in their own hearts, whether they are in the ministry or not.

As you intimate that you are, in the main, favored with liberty and usefulness in the pulpit, give me leave to ask you, What you would do, if you did not find yourself occasionally poor, insufficient, and, as you express it, stupid, at other times? Are you aware of what might be the possible, the probable, the almost certain consequences, if you always found your spirit enlarged, and your frames lively and comfortable? Would you not be in great danger of being puffed up with spiritual pride? Would you not be less sensible of your absolute dependence upon the power of Christ, and of your continual need of his blood, pardon, and intercession? Would you not be quite at a loss to speak suitably and feelingly to the case of many gracious souls, who are groaning under those effects of a depraved nature, from which, upon that supposition, you would be exempted? How could you speak properly upon the deceitfulness of the heart, if you did not feel the deceitfulness of your own, or adapt yourself to the changing experiences through which your hearers pass, if you yourself were always alike, or nearly so? Or how could you speak pertinently of the inward warfare, the contrary principles of flesh and spirit fighting one against another, if your own spiritual

desires were always vigorous and successful, and met with little opposition or control?

The apostle Paul, though favored with a singular eminency in grace, felt at times that he had no sufficiency in himself, even so much as to think a good thought; and he saw there was a danger of his being exalted above measure, if the Lord had not wisely and graciously tempered his dispensations to prevent it. By "being exalted above measure," perhaps, there may be a reference not only to his spirit, lest he should think more highly of himself than he ought, but likewise to his preaching, lest, not having the same causes of complaint and humiliation in common with others, he should shoot over the heads of his hearers, confine himself chiefly to speak of such comforts and privileges as he himself enjoyed, and have little to say for the refreshment of those who were discouraged and cast down by continual conflict with indwelling sin. The angel who appeared to Cornelius did not preach the gospel to him, but directed him to send for Peter; for though the glory and grace of the Saviour seems a fitter subject for an angel's powers than for the poor stammering tongues of sinful men, yet an angel could not preach experimentally, nor describe the warfare between grace and sin from his own feelings. And if we could suppose a minister as full of comforts, and as free from failings as an angel, though he would be a good and happy man, I cannot conceive that he would be a good or useful preacher; for he would not know how to sympathize with the weak and afflicted of the flock, or to comfort them under their difficulties with the consolations wherewith he himself, in similar circumstances, had been comforted of God. It belongs to your calling of God, as a minister, that you should have a taste of the various spiritual trials which are incident to the Lord's people, that thereby you may possess the tongue of the learned, and know how to speak a word in season to them that are weary; and it is likewise needful to keep you perpetually attentive to that important admonition, "Without me ye can do nothing."

Thus much, considering you as a minister. But we may extend the subject so as to make it applicable to believers in general. I would observe, therefore, that it is a sign of a sad declension, if one, who has tasted that the Lord

is gracious, should be capable of being fully satisfied with any thing short of the light of his countenance, which is better than life. A resting in notions of gospel-truth, or in the recollection of past comforts, without a continual thirst for fresh communications from the fountain of life, is, I am afraid, the canker which eats away the beauty and fruitfulness of many professors in the present day; and which, if it does not prove them to be absolutely dead, is, at least, a sufficient evidence that they are lamentably sick. But if we are conscious of the desire, if we seek it carefully in the use of all appointed means, if we willingly allow ourselves in nothing which has a known tendency to grieve the Spirit of God, and to damp our sense of divine things; then, if the Lord is pleased to keep us short of those comforts which he has taught us to prize, and, instead of lively sensations of joy and praise, we feel a languor and deadness of spirit, provided we do indeed feel it, and are humbled for it, we have no need to give way to despondency or excessive sorrow; still the foundation of our hope, and the ground of our abiding joys, are the same; and the heart may be as really alive to God, and grace as truly in exercise, when we walk in comparative darkness, and see little light, as when the frame of our spirits is more comfortable. Neither the reality nor the measure of grace can be properly estimated by the degree of our sensible comforts. The great question is, How are we practically influenced by the word of God as the ground of our hope, and as the governing rule of our tempers and conversation? The apostle exhorts believers to rejoice in the Lord always. He well knew that they were exposed to trials and temptations, and to much trouble, from an evil heart of unbelief; and he prevents the objections we might be ready to make, by adding, "And again, I say, Rejoice!" As if he had said, I speak upon mature consideration; I call upon you to rejoice, not at some times only, but at all times; not only when upon the mount, but when in the valley; not only when you conquer, but while you are fighting; not only when the Lord shines upon you, but when he seems to hide his face. When he enables you to do all things, you are no better in yourselves than you were before; and when you feel you can do nothing, you are no worse. Your experiences will vary, but his love and promises are always un-

changeable. Though our desires of comfort, and what we call lively frames, cannot be too importunate, while they are regulated by a due submission to his will, yet they may be inordinate for want of such submission. Sinful principles may, and too often do, mix with and defile our best desires. I have often detected the two vile abominations, self-will and self-righteousness, insinuating themselves into this concern; like Satan, who works by them, they can occasionally assume the appearance of an angel of light. I have felt an impatience in my spirit, utterly unsuitable to my state as a sinner and a beggar, and to my profession of yielding myself, and all my concerns, to the Lord's disposal. He has mercifully convinced me that I labor under a complication of disorders, summed up in the word sin; he has graciously revealed himself to me as the infallible Physician, and has enabled me to commit myself to him, as such, and to expect my cure from his hand alone. Yet how often, instead of thankfully accepting his prescriptions, have I foolishly and presumptuously ventured to prescribe to him, and to point out how I would have him deal with me? How often have I thought something was necessary, which he saw best to deny, and that I could have done better without those dispensations which his wisdom appointed to work for my good? He is God, and not man, or else he would have been weary of me, and left me to my own management long ago. How inconsistent! to acknowledge that I am blind, to entreat him to lead me, and yet to want to choose my own way, in the same breath. I have limited the Holy One of Israel, and not considered, that he magnifies his wisdom and grace in working by contraries, and bringing good out of seeming evil. It has cost me something to bring myself to confess that he is wiser than I; but I trust, through his blessing, I have not suffered wholly in vain. My sensible comforts have not been great; the proofs I have had of the evils of my sinful nature, my incapacity and aversion to good, have neither been few nor small; but by these unpromising means, I hope, he has made his grace and salvation precious to my soul, and in some measure weaned me from leaning to my own understanding.

Again, self-righteousness has had a considerable hand in

dictating many of my desires for an increase of comfort and spiritual strength. I have wanted some stock of my own. I have been wearied of being so perpetually beholden to him, and necessitated to come to him always in the same strain, as a poor miserable sinner. I could have liked to have done something for myself in common, and to have depended upon him chiefly upon extraordinary occasions. I have found, indeed, that I could do nothing without his assistance, nor any thing even with it, but what I have reason to be ashamed of. If this had only humbled me, and led me to rejoice in his all-sufficiency, it would have been well. But it has often had a different effect, to make me sullen, angry, and discontented; as if it was not best, and most desirable, that he should have all the glory of his own work, and I should have nothing to boast of, but that in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. I am now learning to glory only in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; to be content to be nothing, that he may be all in all. But I find this a hard lesson; and when I seem to have made some proficiency, a slight turn in my spirit throws me back, and I have to begin all again.

This is an inseparable connexion between causes and effects. There can be no effect without a cause, no active cause without a proportionable effect. Now indwelling sin is an active cause; and, therefore, while it remains in our nature, it will produce effects according to its strength. Why then should I be surprised, that if the Lord suspends his influence for a moment, in that moment sin will discover itself? Why should I wonder that I can feel no lively exercise of grace, no power to raise my heart to God, any farther than he is pleased to work in me mightily,—any more than wonder that I do not find fire in the bottom of a well, or that it should not be day when the sun is withdrawn from the earth? Humbled I ought to be, to find I am so totally depraved; but not discouraged, since Jesus is appointed to me of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; and since I find that, in the midst of all this darkness and deadness, he keeps alive the principle of grace which he has implanted in my heart.

As to Mr. Rutherford's expression which you mention, that "there is no temptation like being without tempta-

tion;" I allow it in a qualified sense, that is, it is the better of the two, to suffer from Satan's fiery darts, than to be lulled asleep, and drawn into a careless security, by his more subtle, though less perceptible, devices; so as to grow indifferent to the means of grace, and sink into a worldly spirit; or, like the church of Laodicea, to imagine ourselves rich, and increased in goods, and that we have need of nothing. But I am persuaded this is not your case; the deadness you complain of, and which is a burden you groan under, is a very different thing. And I advise you to be cautious how you indulge a desire to be exercised with Satan's temptations, as supposing they would be conducive to make you more spiritual, or would, of course, open you a way to greater consolations. If you have such a desire, I may say to you, in our Lord's words, "You know not what you ask." He who knows our weakness, and the power of our adversary, has graciously directed us to pray that we enter not into temptation. Have you considered what the enemy can do, if he is permitted to come in like a flood? In one hour he could raise such a storm, as would put you to your wit's end. He could bring such a dark cloud over your mind, as would blot out all remembrance of your past comforts, or at least prevent you from deriving the least support from them. He could not only fight against your peace, but shake the very foundations of your hope, and bring you to question, not only your interest in the promises, but even to doubt of the most important and fundamental truths upon which your hopes have been built. Be thankful, therefore, if the Lord restrains his malice. A young sailor is often impatient of a short calm; but the experienced mariner, who has been often tossed with tempests, and upon the point of perishing, will seldom wish for a storm. In a word, let us patiently wait upon the Lord, and be content to follow as he leads, and he will surely do us good.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

THOUGHTS ON THE EXERCISE OF SOCIAL PRAYER.

SIR,

I ACCOUNT it a great mercy, that at this time, when iniquity so generally abounds, there is a number, I hope a growing number, whose eyes affect their hearts, and who are stirred up to unite in prayer for the spreading of gospel-knowledge, and a blessing upon our sinful land. Meetings for social prayer are frequent in different parts of the kingdom, and amongst various denominations of Christians. As the Lord has promised, that when he prepares the heart to pray, he will graciously incline his ear to hear, who can tell but he may yet be entreated for us, and avert the heavy and justly-deserved judgments which seem to hang over us?

It is much to be desired that our hearts might be so affected with a sense of divine things, and so closely engaged when we are worshipping God, that it might not be in the power of little circumstances to interrupt and perplex us, and to make us think the service wearisome, and the time which we employ in it tedious. But as your infirmities are many and great, and the enemy of our souls is watchful to discompose us, if care is not taken by those who lead in social prayer, the exercise which is approved by the judgment may become a burden, and an occasion of sin. Complaints of this kind are frequent, and might perhaps be easily rectified, if the persons chiefly concerned were spoken to in love. But as they are usually the last who hear of it, it may perhaps be of service to communicate a few remarks on a subject of such general concern.

The chief fault of some good prayers is, that they are too long; not that I think we should pray by the clock, and limit ourselves precisely to a certain number of minutes; but it is the better of the two that the hearers should wish the prayer had been longer, than spend half, or a considerable part of the time, in wishing it was over. This is frequently owing to an unnecessary enlargement upon every circumstance that offers, as well as to the repetition of the same things. If we have been copious in pleading for spiritual blessings, it may be best to be brief and summary in

the article of intercession for others; or if the frame of our spirits, or the circumstances of affairs, lead us to be more large and particular in laying the cases of others before the Lord, respect should be had to this intention in the former part of the prayer. There are, doubtless, seasons when the Lord is pleased to favor those who pray with a peculiar liberty; they speak because they feel; they have a wrestling spirit, and hardly know how to leave off. When this is the case, they who join with them are seldom wearied, though the prayer should be protracted something beyond the usual limits. But I believe it sometimes happens, both in praying and in preaching, that we are apt to spin out our time to the greatest length, when we have, in reality, the least to say. Long prayers should in general be avoided, especially where several persons are to pray successively, or else even spiritual hearers will be unable to keep up their attention. And here I would just notice an impropriety we sometimes meet with, that when a person gives expectation that he is just going to conclude his prayer, something not thought of in its proper place occurring that instant to his mind, leads him, as it were, to begin again. But, unless it is a matter of singular importance, it would be better omitted for that time.

The prayers of some good men are more like preaching than praying. They rather express the Lord's mind to the people, than the desires of the people to the Lord. Indeed this can hardly be called prayer. It might, in another place, stand for a part of a good sermon, but will afford little help to those who desire to pray with their hearts. Prayer should be sententious, and made up of breathings to the Lord, either of confession, petition, or praise. It should be not only scriptural and evangelical, but experimental, a simple and unstudied expression of the wants and feelings of the soul. It will be so if the heart is lively and affected in the duty; it must be so if the edification of others is the point in view.

Several books have been written to assist in the gift and exercise of prayer, as by Dr. Watts, and others; and many useful hints may be borrowed from them; but a too close attention to the method and transitions therein recommended gives an air of study and formality, and offends against that simplicity which is so essentially necessary to

a good prayer, that no degree of acquired abilities can compensate for the want of it. It is possible to learn to pray mechanically, and by rule; but it is hardly possible to do so with acceptance, and benefit to others. When the several parts of invocation, adoration, confession, petition, &c. follow each other in a stated order, the hearer's mind generally goes before the speaker's voice, and we can form a tolerable conjecture what is to come next. On this account we often find that unlettered people, who have had little or no help from books, or rather have not been fettered by them, can pray with an unction and savor in an unpremeditated way, while the prayers of persons of much superior abilities, perhaps even of ministers themselves, are, though accurate and regular, so dry and starched, that they afford little either of pleasure or profit to a spiritual mind. The spirit of prayer is the truth and token of the spirit of adoption. The studied addresses with which some approach the throne of grace, remind us of a stranger's coming to a great man's door; he knocks and waits, sends in his name, and goes through a course of ceremony before he gains admittance, while a child of the family uses no ceremony at all, but enters freely when he pleases, because he knows he is at home. It is true we ought always to draw near the Lord with great humiliation of spirit, and a sense of our unworthiness. But this spirit is not always best expressed or promoted by a pompous enumeration of the names and titles of the God with whom we have to do, or by fixing in our minds before hand the exact order in which we propose to arrange the several parts of our prayer. Some attention to method may be proper, for the prevention of repetitions; and plain people may be a little defective in it sometimes, but this defect will not be half so tiresome and disagreeable as a studied and artificial exactness.

Many, perhaps most people, who pray in public, have some favorite word or expression which recurs too often in their prayers, and is frequently used as a mere expletive, having no necessary connexion with the sense of what they are speaking. The most disagreeable of these is, when the name of the blessed God, with the addition of perhaps one or more epithets, as Great, Glorious, Holy, Almighty, &c. is introduced so often, and without necessity, as seems

neither to indicate a due reverence in the person who uses it, or suited to excite reverence in those who hear. I will not say that this is taking the name of God in vain, in the usual sense of the phrase; it is, however, a great impropriety, and should be guarded against. It would be well if they who use redundant expressions had a friend to give them a caution, as they might, with a little care, be retrenched; and hardly any person can be sensible of the little peculiarities he may inadvertently adopt, unless he is told of it.

There are several things likewise respecting the voice and manner of prayer, which a person may, with due care, correct in himself, and which, if generally corrected, would make meetings for prayer more pleasant than they sometimes are. These I shall mention by pairs, as the happy and agreeable way is a medium between two inconvenient extremes.

Very loud speaking is a fault, when the size of the place and the number of hearers do not render it necessary. The end of speaking is to be heard; and when that end is attained, a greater elevation of the voice is frequently hurtful to the speaker, and is more likely to confuse a hearer than to fix his attention. I do not deny but allowance must be made for constitution, and the warmth of the passions, which dispose some persons to speak louder than others. Yet such will do well to restrain themselves as much as they can. It may seem indeed to indicate great earnestness, and that the heart is much affected; yet it is often but false fire. It may be thought speaking with power; but a person who is favored with the Lord's presence may pray with power in a moderate voice; and there may be very little power of the Spirit, though the voice should be heard in the street and neighborhood.

The other extreme, of speaking too low, is not so frequent; but if we are not heard, we might as well altogether hold our peace. It exhausts the spirits, and wearies the attention, to be listening for a length of time to a very low voice. Some words or sentences will be lost, which will render what is heard less intelligible and agreeable. If the speaker can be heard by the person farthest distant from him, the rest will hear of course.

The tone of the voice is likewise to be regarded. Some

have a tone in prayer so very different from their usual way of speaking, that their nearest friends, if not accustomed to them, could hardly know them by their voice. Sometimes the tone is changed, perhaps more than once, so that if our eyes did not give us more certain information than our ears, we might think two or three persons had been speaking by turns. It is pity that when we approve what is spoken we should be so easily disconcerted by an awkwardness of delivery; yet so it often is, and probably so it will be, in the present weak and imperfect state of human nature. It is more to be lamented than wondered at, that sincere Christians are sometimes forced to confess, "He is a good man, and his prayers, as to their substance, are spiritual and judicious; but there is something so displeasing in his manner, that I am always uneasy when I hear him."

Contrary to this, and still more offensive, is a custom that some have of talking to the Lord in prayer. It is their natural voice, indeed, but it is that expression of it which they use upon the most familiar and trivial occasions. The human voice is capable of so many inflexions and variations, that it can adapt itself to the different sensations of our mind, as joy, sorrow, fear, desire, &c. If a man was pleading for his life, or expressing his thanks to the king for a pardon, common sense and decency would teach him a suitableness of manner; and any one, who could not understand his language, might know, by the sound of his words, that he was not making a bargain, or telling a story. How much more, when we speak to the King of kings, should the consideration of his glory, and our own vileness, and of the important concerns we are engaged in before him, impress us with an air of seriousness and reverence, and prevent us from speaking to him as if he was altogether such a one as ourselves? The liberty to which we are called by the gospel, does not at all encourage such a pertness and familiarity as would be unbecoming to use towards a fellow-worm, who was a little advanced above us in worldly dignity.

I shall be glad if these hints may be of any service to those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth, and who wish that whatever has a tendency to damp the spirit of devotion, either in themselves or in others, might be

avoided. It is a point of delicacy and difficulty to tell any one what we wish could be altered in his manner of prayer, but it can give no just offence to ask a friend if he has read a letter on this subject, in "A Collection of Twenty-six Letters," published in 1775.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIX.

ON CONTROVERSY.

DEAR SIR,

As you are likely to be engaged in controversy, and your love of truth is joined with a natural warmth of temper, my friendship makes me solicitous on your behalf. You are of the strongest side; for truth is great, and must prevail; so that a person of abilities inferior to yours might take the field with a confidence of victory. I am not therefore anxious for the event of the battle; but I would have you more than a conqueror, and to triumph not only over your adversary, but over yourself. If you cannot be vanquished, you may be wounded. To preserve you from such wounds as might give you cause of weeping over your conquests, I would present you with some considerations, which, if duly attended to, will do you the service of a coat of mail; such armor, that you need not complain, as David did of Saul's, that it will be more cumbersome than useful; for you will easily perceive it is taken from that great magazine provided for the Christian soldier, the word of God. I take it for granted that you will not expect any apology for my freedom, and therefore I shall not offer one. For method's sake, I may reduce my advice to three heads, —respecting your opponent, the public, and yourself.

As to your opponent, I wish, that before you set pen to paper against him, and during the whole time you are preparing your answer, you may commend him by earnest prayer to the Lord's teaching and blessing. This practice will have a direct tendency to conciliate your heart to love and pity him; and such a disposition will have a good influence upon every page you write. If you account him a

believer, though greatly mistaken in the subject of debate between you, the words of David to Joab, concerning Absalom, are very applicable: "Deal gently with him for my sake." The Lord loves him, and bears with him; therefore you must not despise him, or treat him harshly. The Lord bears with you likewise, and expects that you should show tenderness to others, from a sense of the much forgiveness you need yourself. In a little while you will meet in heaven; he will then be dearer to you than the nearest friend you have upon earth is to you now. Anticipate that period in your thoughts; and though you may find it necessary to oppose his errors, view him personally as a kindred soul, with whom you are to be happy in Christ for ever. But if you look upon him as an unconverted person, in a state of enmity against God and his grace, (a supposition which, without good evidence, you should be very unwilling to admit,) he is a more proper object of your compassion than of your anger. Alas! he knows not what he does: but you know who has made you to differ. If God, in his sovereign pleasure, had so appointed, you might have been as he is now; and he, instead of you, might have been set for the defence of the gospel. You were both equally blind by nature. If you attend to this, you will not reproach or hate him because the Lord has been pleased to open your eyes, and not his. Of all people, who engage in controversy, we, who are called Calvinists, are most expressly bound by our own principles to the exercise of gentleness and moderation. If, indeed, they who differ from us have a power of changing themselves, if they can open their own eyes, and soften their own hearts, then we might with less inconsistency be offended at their obstinacy; but if we believe the very contrary to this, our part is, not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who oppose, "if peradventure God will give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth." If you write with a desire of being an instrument of correcting mistakes, you will of course be cautious of laying stumbling-blocks in the way of the blind, or of using any expressions that may exasperate their passions, confirm them in their prejudices, and thereby make their conviction, humanly speaking, more impracticable.

By printing, you will appeal to the public, where your

readers may be ranged under three divisions. First, such as differ from you in principle. Concerning these I may refer you to what I have already said. Though you have your eye upon one person chiefly, there are many like-minded with him; and the same reasoning will hold whether as to one or to a million. There will be likewise many who pay too little regard to religion to have any settled system of their own, and yet are pre-engaged in favor of those sentiments which are least repugnant to the good opinion men naturally have of themselves. These are very incompetent judges of doctrines, but they can form a tolerable judgment of a writer's spirit. They know that meekness, humility, and love, are the characteristics of a christian temper; and though they affect to treat the doctrines of grace as mere notions and speculations, which, supposing they adopted them, would have no salutary influence upon their conduct; yet from us, who profess these principles, they always expect such dispositions as correspond with the precepts of the gospel. They are quick-sighted to discern when we deviate from such a spirit, and avail themselves of it to justify their contempt of our arguments. The scriptural maxim, That "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," is verified by daily observation. If our zeal is embittered by expressions of anger, invective, or scorn, we may think we are doing service to the cause of truth, when in reality we shall only bring it into discredit. The weapons of our warfare, and which alone are powerful to break down the strong holds of error, are not carnal, but spiritual; arguments fairly drawn from Scripture and experience, and enforced by such a mild address, as may persuade our readers that, whether we can convince them or not, we wish well to their souls, and contend only for the truth's sake: if we can satisfy them that we act up to these motives, our point is half gained; they will be more disposed to consider calmly what we offer; and if they should still dissent from our opinions, they will be constrained to approve of our intentions.

You will have a third class of readers, who, being of your own sentiments, will readily approve of what you advance, and may be further established and confirmed in their views of Scripture doctrines by a clear and masterly elucidation of your subject. You may be instrumental to their edifi-

cation if the law of kindness, as well as of truth, regulates your pen, otherwise you may do them harm. There is a principle of self, which disposes us to despise those who differ from us; and we are often under its influence when we think we are only showing a becoming zeal in the cause of God. I readily believe that the leading points of Arminianism spring from, and are nourished by, the pride of the human heart; but I should be glad if the reverse was always true; and that to embrace what are called the Calvinistic doctrines was an infallible token of an humble mind. I think I have known some Arminians, that is, persons who, for want of clearer light, have been afraid of receiving the doctrines of free grace, who yet have given evidence that their hearts were in a degree humbled before the Lord. And I am afraid there are Calvinists who, while they account it a proof of their humility that they are willing, in words, to debase the creature, and to give all the glory of salvation to the Lord, yet know not what manner of spirit they are of. Whatever it be that makes us trust in ourselves that we are comparatively wise or good, so as to treat those with contempt who do not subscribe to our doctrines, or follow our party, is a proof and fruit of a self-righteous spirit. Self-righteousness can feed upon doctrines, as well as upon works; and a man may have the heart of a Pharisee, while his head is stored with orthodox notions of the unworthiness of the creature, and the riches of free grace. Yea, I would add, the best of men are not wholly free from this leaven, and therefore are too apt to be pleased with such representations as hold up our adversaries to ridicule, and, by consequence, flatter our own superior judgments. Controversies, for the most part, are so managed as to indulge, rather than to repress, this wrong disposition; and therefore, generally speaking, they are productive of little good. They provoke those whom they should convince, and puff up those whom they should edify. I hope your performance will savor of a spirit of true humility, and be a means of promoting it in others.

This leads me, in the last place, to consider your own concern in your present undertaking. It seems a laudable service to defend the faith once delivered to the saints; we are commanded to contend earnestly for it, and to convince gainsayers. If ever such defences were seasonable and ex-

pedient, they appear to be so in our day, when errors abound on all sides, and every truth of the gospel is either directly denied or grossly misrepresented. And yet we find but very few writers of controversy who have not been manifestly hurt by it. Either they grow in a sense of their own importance, or imbibe an angry, contentious spirit, or they insensibly withdraw their attention from those things which are the food and immediate support of the life of faith, and spend their time and strength upon matters which, at most, are but of a secondary value. This shows that if the service is honorable, it is dangerous. What will it profit a man if he gain his cause, and silence his adversary, if, at the same time, he loses that humble, tender frame of spirit in which the Lord delights, and to which the promise of his presence is made? Your aim, I doubt not, is good; but you have need to watch and pray, for you will find Satan at your right hand, to resist you. He will try to debase your views; and though you set out in defence of the cause of God, if you are not continually looking to the Lord to keep you, it may become your own cause, and awaken in you those tempers which are inconsistent with true peace of mind, and will surely obstruct communion with God. Be upon your guard against admitting any thing personal into the debate. If you think you have been ill treated, you will have an opportunity of showing that you are a disciple of Jesus, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not." This is our pattern; thus we are to speak and write for God, "not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; knowing that hereunto we are called." The wisdom that is from above is not only pure, but peaceable and gentle; and the want of these qualifications, like the dead fly in the pot of ointment, will spoil the savor and efficacy of our labors. If we act in a wrong spirit, we shall bring little glory to God, do little good to our fellow-creatures, and procure neither honor nor comfort to ourselves. If you can be content with showing your wit, and gaining the laugh on your side, you have an easy task; but I hope you have a far nobler aim, and that, sensible of the solemn importance of gospel-truths, and the compassion due to the souls of men, you would rather be a means of removing prejudices in a single instance, than obtain the empty ap-

plause of thousands. Go forth, therefore, in the name and strength of the Lord of Hosts, speaking the truth in love; and may he give you a witness in many hearts, that you are taught of God, and favored with the unction of his Holy Spirit.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

ON CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

DEAR SIR,

You will, perhaps, be surprised to see my thoughts on your query in print, rather than to receive them by post, as you expected. But as the subject of it is of general concern, I hope that you will not be displeased that I have taken this method. It would do honor to the pen of an able casuist, and might be of considerable service in the present day, clearly to explain the force of the apostle's precept, "Be not conformed to this world;" and to state the just boundary between a sinful compliance with the world, and that scrupulous singularity which springs from a self-righteous principle; and a contracted view of the spirit and liberty of the gospel. To treat this point accurately, would require a treatise, rather than a letter; I only undertake to offer you a few hints; and, indeed, when the mind is formed to a spiritual taste, a simple desire to be guided by the word and Spirit of God, together with a due attention to our own experience, will, in the most practical cases, supersede the necessity of long and elaborate disquisitions.

By the world, in the passage alluded to, Rom. 12:2. I suppose the apostle means the men of the world, in distinction from believers; these, not having the love of God in their hearts, or his fear before their eyes, are, of course, engaged in such pursuits and practices as are inconsistent with our holy calling, and in which we cannot imitate or comply with them, without hurting our peace and our profession. We are, therefore, bound to avoid conformity to them in all such instances; but we are not obliged to decline all intercourse with the world, or to impose restraints upon ourselves, when the scriptures do not restrain us, in

order to make us as unlike the world as possible. To instance in a few particulars:

It is not necessary, perhaps, it is not lawful, wholly to renounce the society of the world. A mistake of this kind took place in the early ages of christianity, and men (at first, perhaps, with a sincere desire of serving God without distraction) withdrew into the deserts and uninhabited places, and wasted their lives at a distance from their fellow-creatures. But unless we could flee from ourselves likewise, this would afford us no advantage; so long as we carry our own wicked hearts with us, we shall be exposed to temptation, go where we will. Besides, this would be thwarting the end of our vocation. Christians are to be the salt and the light of the world, conspicuous as cities set upon a hill; they are commanded to "let their light shine before men, that they, beholding their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven." This injudicious deviation from the paths of nature and providence, gave occasion, at length, to the vilest abominations; and men, who withdrew from the world under the pretence of retirement, became the more wicked and abandoned, as they lived more out of public view and observation.

Nor are we at liberty, much less are we enjoined, to renounce the duties of relative life, so as to become careless in the discharge of them. Allowances should, indeed, be made for the distresses of persons newly awakened, or under the power of temptation, which may, for a time, so much engross their thoughts, as greatly to indispose them for their bounden duty. But in general, the proper evidence of true christians, is, not merely that they can talk about divine things, but that, by the grace of God, they live and act agreeable to the rules of his word, in the state in which his providence has placed them, whether as masters or servants, husbands or wives, parents or children: bearing rule, or yielding obedience, as in his sight. Diligence and fidelity in the management of temporal concerns, though observable in the practice of many worldly men, may be maintained without a sinful conformity to the world.

Neither are we required to refuse a moderate use of the comforts and conveniencies of life, suitable to the station which God has appointed us in the world. The spirit of

self-righteousness and will-worship works much in this way, and supposes that there is something excellent in long fastings, in abstaining from pleasant food, in wearing meaner clothes than is customary with those in the same rank of life, and in many other austerities and singularities not commanded by the word of God. And many persons, who are in the main sincere, are grievously burdened with scruples respecting the use of lawful things. It is true, there is need of a constant watch, lest what is lawful in itself become hurtful to us by its abuse. But these outward strictnesses may be carried to great lengths, without a spark of true grace, and even without the knowledge of the true God. The mortifications and austerities practised by the Bramins in India (if the accounts we have of them be true) are vastly more severe than the most zealous effects of modern superstition in our country. There is a strictness which arises rather from ignorance than knowledge, is wholly conversant about externals, and gratifies the spirit of self as much in one way as it seems to retrench it in another. A man may almost starve his body to feed his pride; but to those who fear and serve the Lord, every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the precept is very extensive and important. "Be not conformed to the world." As believers, we are strangers and pilgrims upon earth. Heaven is our country, and the Lord is our King. We are to be known and noticed as his subjects, and, therefore, it is his pleasure, that we do not speak the language, or adopt the customs of the land in which we sojourn. We are not to conform to the world, as we did in the days of our ignorance. And though we have received the principles of grace, and have tasted of the goodness of the Lord, the admonition is still needful; for we are renewed but in part, and are liable to be drawn aside to our hurt, by the prevalence of evil examples and customs around us.

We must not conform to the spirit of the world. As members of society, we have a part to act in it, in common with others. But if our business is the same, our principles and ends are to be entirely different. Diligence in our respective callings is, as I have already observed, commendable, and our duty; but not with the same views which

stimulate the men of the world. If they rise early, and take rest late, their endeavors spring from, and terminate in self, to establish and increase their own importance, to add house to house, and field to field, that, like the builders of Babel, they may get themselves a name, or provide means for the gratification of their sinful passions. If they succeed, they sacrifice to their own net; if they are crossed in their designs, they are filled with anxiety and impatience; they either murmur or despond. But a christian is to pursue his lawful calling with an eye to the providence of God, and with submission to his wisdom. Thus, so far as he acts in the exercise of faith, he cannot be disappointed. He casts his care upon his heavenly Father, who has promised to take care of him. What he gives, he receives with thankfulness, and is careful, as a faithful steward, to improve it for the furtherance of the cause of God, and the good of mankind; and if he meets with losses and crosses, he is not disconcerted, knowing that all his concerns are under a divine direction; that the Lord, whom he serves, chooses for him better than he could choose for himself: and that his best treasure is safe, out of the reach of the various changes to which all things in the present state are liable.

We must not conform to the maxims of the world. The world, in various instances, calls evil good, and good evil. But we are to have recourse to the law and to the testimony, and to judge of things by the unerring word of God, uninfluenced by the determination of the great, or the many. We are to obey God rather than man; though, upon this account, we may expect to be despised or reviled, to be made a gazing-stock or a laughing-stock to those who set his authority at defiance. We must bear our testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, avow the cause of his despised people, and walk in the practice of universal obedience, patiently endure reproaches and labor to overcome evil with good. Thus we shall show that we are not ashamed of him. And there is an hour coming, when he will not be ashamed of us, who have followed him, and borne his cross, in the midst of a perverse generation, but will own our worthless names before the assembled world.

We must not conform to the world in their amusements and diversions. We are to mix with the world so far as

our necessary and providential connexions engage us; so far as we have a reasonable expectation of doing, or getting good, and no further. "What fellowship hath light with darkness, or what concord hath Christ with Belial?" What call can a believer have into those places and companies, where every thing tends to promote a spirit of dissipation; where the fear of God has no place; where things are purposely disposed to inflame, or indulge corrupt and sinful appetites and passions, and to banish all serious thoughts of God and ourselves? If it is our duty to redeem time, to walk with God, to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to follow the example which he set us when he was upon earth, and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling; it must of course be our duty to avoid a conformity with the world in those vain and sensual diversions, which stand in as direct contradiction to a spiritual frame of mind as darkness to light.

The leading desires of every person under the influence of gospel-principles, will be to maintain a habitual communion with God in his own soul, and to manifest the power of his grace in the sight of men. So far as a christian is infected by a conformity to the spirit, maxims, and sinful customs of the world, these desires will be disappointed. Fire and water are not more opposite than that peace of God which passeth all understanding, and that poor precarious pleasure which is sought in a compliance with the world; a pleasure (if worthy the name) which grieves the spirit of God and stupifies the heart. Whoever, after having tasted that the Lord is gracious, has been prevailed on to make the experiment, and to mingle with the world's vanities, has certainly thereby brought a damp upon his experience, and indisposed himself for the exercise of prayer, and the contemplation of divine truths. And if any are not sensible of a difference in this respect, it is because the poison has taken a still deeper effect, so as to benumb their spiritual senses. Conformity to the world is the bane of many professors in this day. They have found a way, as they think, to serve both God and mammon. But because they are double-minded, they are unstable; they make no progress; and notwithstanding their frequent attendance upon ordinances, they are lean from day to day; a form of godliness, a scheme of orthodox notions, they

may attain to, but they will remain destitute of the life, power, and comfort of religion, so long as they cleave to those things which are incompatible with it.

Conformity to the world is equally an obstruction in the way of those who profess a desire of glorifying God in the sight of men. Such professors do rather dishonor him; by their conduct, as far as in them lies, they declare, that they do not find the religion of the gospel answer their expectations; that it does not afford them the satisfaction they once hoped for from it; and that therefore they are forced to seek relief from the world. They grieve the people of God by their compliances, and oftentimes they mislead the weak, and, by their examples encourage them to venture upon the like liberties, which otherwise they durst not have attempted. They embolden the wicked likewise in their evil ways, while they see a manifest inconsistency between their avowed principles and their practice; and thus they cause the ways of truth to be evil spoken of. The paper constrains me to conclude abruptly. May the Lord enable you and me to lay this subject to heart, and to pray that we may, on the one hand, rightly understand and prize our christian liberty; and, on the other hand, be preserved from that growing evil, a conformity to the world.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXI.

"I WAS ONCE BLIND, BUT NOW I SEE."

DEAR SIR,

The question, What is the discriminating characteristic nature of a work of grace upon the soul? has been upon my mind; if I am able to give you satisfaction concerning it, I shall think my time well employed.

The reason why men in a natural state are utterly ignorant of spiritual truths, is, that they are wholly destitute of a faculty suited to their perception. A remarkable instance we have in the absurd construction which Nicodemus put upon what our Lord had spoken to him concerning the new birth. And in the supernatural communication of

this spiritual faculty, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, I apprehend the inimitable and abiding criterion, which is the subject of our inquiry, does, primarily consist. Those passages of scripture wherein the gospel-truth is compared to light, lead to a familiar illustration of my meaning. Men, by nature, are stark blind with respect to this light; by grace the eyes of the understanding are opened. Among a number of blind men, some may be more ingenious and of better capacity than others. They may be better qualified for such studies and employments which do not require eye-sight, than many who can see; and may attain to considerable skill in them; but with respect to the true nature of light and colors, they are all exactly upon a level. A blind man, if ingenious and inquisitive, may learn to talk about the light, the sun or the rainbow, in terms borrowed from those who have seen them; but it is impossible that he can have (I mean a man born blind) a just idea of either; and whatever hear-say knowledge he may have acquired, he can hardly talk much upon these subjects without betraying his real ignorance. The case of one mentioned by Mr. Locke has been often quoted. He believed, that after much inquiry and reflection, he had at last found out what scarlet was; and being asked to explain himself, "I think," says he, "scarlet has something like the sound of a trumpet." This man had about the same knowledge of natural light as Nicodemus had of spiritual. Nor can all the learning or study in the world enable any person to form a suitable judgment of divine truth, till the eyes of his mind are opened, and then he will perceive it at once.

Indeed this comparison is well suited to show the entire difference between nature and grace, and to explain the ground of that enmity and scorn which fills the hearts of blinded sinners, against those who profess to have been enlightened by the Spirit of God. The reason why blind men are not affronted when we tell them they cannot see, seems to be, that they are borne down by the united testimony of all who are about them. Every one talks of seeing; and they find by experience, that those who say they can see can do many things which the blind cannot. Some such conviction as this many have, who live where the gospel is preached, and is made the power of God to the salvation of others. The conversation and conduct of the people of God convinces them, that there is a difference,

though they cannot tell, wherein it consists. But if we would suppose it possible, that there was a whole nation of blind men, and one or two persons should go amongst them, and profess that they could see, while they could not offer them such a proof of their assertion as they were capable of receiving, nor even explain, to their satisfaction, what they meant by sight; what may we imagine would be the consequence? I think there is little doubt but these innovators would experience much the same treatment as the believers of Jesus often meet with from a blind world. The blind people would certainly hate and despise them for presuming to pretend to what they had not. They would try to dispute them out of their senses, and bring many arguments to prove, that there could be no such thing as either light or sight. They would say, as many say now, How is it, if these things are so, that we should know nothing of them? Yea, I think it probable, they would rise against them as deceivers and enthusiasts, and disturbers of the public peace, and say, "Away with such fellows from the earth; it is not fit that they should live." But if we should suppose further, that during the heat of the contest, some of these blind men should have their eyes suddenly opened, the dispute as to them would be at an end in a minute; they would confess their former ignorance and obstinacy, confirm the testimony of those whom they had before despised, and of course share in the same treatment from their blind brethren, perhaps be treated still worse, as apostates from the opinion of the public.

If this illustration is justly applicable to our subject, it may lead us to several observations, or inferences, which have a tendency to confirm what we are elsewhere expressly taught by the word of God.

In the first place, it shows, that regeneration, or that great change without which a man cannot see the kingdom of God, is the effect of almighty power. Neither education, endeavors, or arguments, can open the eyes of the blind. It is God alone, who at first caused light to shine out of darkness, who can shine into our hearts "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." People may attain some natural ideas of spiritual truths by reading books, or hearing sermons, and may thereby become wise in their own conceits: they

may learn to imitate the language of an experienced christian; but they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm, and are as distant from the true meaning of the terms, as a blind man who pronounces the words blue or red, is from the ideas which those words raise in the mind of a person who can distinguish colors by his sight. And from hence we may infer the sovereignty as well as the efficacy of grace; since it is evident, not only that the objective light, the word of God, is not afforded universally to all men; but that those who enjoy the same outward means have not all the same perceptions. There are many who stumble in the noon-day, not for want of light but for want of eyes; and they who now see, were once blind even as others, and had neither power nor will to enlighten their own minds. It is a mercy, however, when people are so far sensible of their own blindness as to be willing to wait for the manifestation of the Lord's power, in the ordinances of his own appointment. He came into the world, and he sends forth his gospel, that those who see not may see; and when there is a desire raised in the heart for spiritual sight, it shall in his due time be answered.

From hence likewise we may observe the proper use and value of the preaching of the gospel, which is the great instrument by which the Holy Spirit opens the blind eyes. Like the rod of Moses, it owes all its efficacy to the appointment and promise of God. Ministers cannot be too earnest in the discharge of their office; it behooves them to use all diligence to find out acceptable words, and to proclaim the whole counsel of God. Yet when they have done all, they have done nothing, unless their word is accompanied to the heart by the power and demonstration of the Spirit. Without this blessing, an apostle might labor in vain: but it shall be in a measure afforded to all who preach the truth in love, in simplicity, and in an humble dependence upon him who alone can give success. This, in a great measure, puts all faithful ministers on a level, notwithstanding any seeming disparity in gifts and abilities. Those who have a lively and pathetic talent may engage the ear, and raise the natural passions of their hearers; but they cannot reach the heart. The blessing may be rather expected to attend the humble than the voluble speaker.

Further we may remark, that there is a difference in

kind, between the highest attainments of nature, and the effects of grace in the lowest degree. Many are convinced, who are not truly enlightened; are afraid of the consequences of sin, though they never saw its evil; have a seeming desire of salvation, which is not founded upon a truly spiritual discovery of their own wretchedness, and the excellency of Jesus. These may, for a season, hear the word with joy, and walk in the way of professors; but we need not be surprised if they do not hold out, for they have not root. Though many shall fall, the foundation of God still standeth sure. We may confidently affirm, upon the warrant of scripture, that they who, having for a while escaped the pollutions of the world, are again habitually entangled in them, or who, having been distressed upon the account of sin, can find relief in a self-righteous course, and stop short of Christ, "who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth;" we may affirm, that these, whatever profession they have made, were never capable of receiving the beauty and glory of the gospel-salvation. On the other hand, though where the eyes are divinely enlightened, the soul's first views of itself and of the gospel may be confused and indistinct, like him who saw men as it were trees walking; yet this light is like the dawn, which, though weak and faint at its first appearance, shineth more and more unto the perfect day. It is the work of God, and his work is perfect in kind, though progressive in the manner. He will not despise or forsake the day of small things. When he thus begins, he will make an end; and such persons, however feeble, poor, and worthless, in their own apprehensions, if they have obtained a glimpse of the Redeemer's glory, as he is made unto us, of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that his name is precious, and the desire of their hearts is towards him, have good reason to hope and believe, as the wife of Manoah did in a similar case, that if the Lord had been pleased to kill them, he would not have shown them such things as these.

Once more, this spiritual sight and faculty is that which may be principally considered as inherent in a believer. He has no stock of grace, or comfort, or strength in himself. He needs continual supplies; and if the Lord withdraws from him, he is as weak and unskilful, after he has

been long engaged in the christian warfare, as he was when he first entered upon it. The eye is of little present use in the dark; for it cannot see without light. But the return of light is no advantage to a blind man. A believer may be much in the dark; but his spiritual sight remains. Though the exercise of grace may be low, he knows himself, he knows the Lord, he knows the way of access to a throne of grace. His frames and feelings may alter; but he has received such a knowledge of the person, and offices, the power and grace, of Jesus the Saviour, as cannot be taken from him; and could withstand even an angel that should preach another gospel, because he has seen the Lord.—The paper constrains me to break off. May the Lord increase his light in your heart, and in the heart of, &c.

LETTER XXII.

ON THE ADVANTAGES OF A STATE OF POVERTY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I confess myself almost ashamed to write to you. You are pinched by poverty, suffer the want of many things; and your faith is often sharply tried, when you look at your family, and, perhaps, can hardly conceive how you shall be able to supply them with bread to the end of the week. The Lord has appointed me a different lot. I am favored, not only with the necessaries, but with the comforts of life. Now, I could easily give you plenty of good advice; I could tell you, it is your duty to be patient, and even thankful in the lowest state; that if you have bread and water, it is more than you deserve at the Lord's hands; and that, as you are out of hell, and made a partaker of the hope of the gospel, you ought not to think any thing hard that you meet with in the way to heaven. If I should say thus, and say no more, you would not dispute the truth of my assertions; but, as coming from me, who live at ease, to you, who are beset with difficulties, you might question their propriety, and think that I know but little of my own heart, and could feel but little for your distress. You would probably compare me to one who should think him-

self a mariner, because he had studied the art of navigation by the fireside, though he had never seen the sea. Yet I hope, by my frequent converse with the Lord's poor (for I live in the midst of an afflicted and poor people) I have made some observations, which, though not strictly the fruit of my own experience, may not be wholly unseasonable or unacceptable to you.

Whether the rich or the poor, who live without God in the world, are most to be pitied, is not easy to determine. It is a dreadful case to be miserable in both worlds; but yet the parade and seeming prosperity in which some live for a few years, will be no abatement, but rather a great aggravation, of their future torment. A madman is equally to be pitied, whether he is laid upon a bed of state or a bed of straw. Madness is in the heart of every unregenerate sinner; and the more he possesses of the world's goods, he is so much the more extensively mischievous. Poverty is so far a negative good to those who have no other restraint, that it confines the effects of the evil heart within narrower bounds, and the small circle of their immediate connexions; whereas the rich, who live under the power of sin, are unfaithful stewards of a large trust; and, by their pernicious influence, are often instrumental in diffusing profaneness and licentiousness through a country or a kingdom, besides the innumerable acts of oppression, and the ravages of war, which are perpetrated to gratify the insatiable demands of luxury, ambition, and pride. But to leave this; if we turn our eyes from the false maxims of the world, and weigh things in the balance of the sanctuary, I believe that we shall find that the believing poor, though they have many trials which call for our compassion, have some advantages above those of the Lord's people to whom he has given a larger share of the good things of the present life. Why else does the apostle say, "God hath chosen the poor?" or why do we see, in fact, that so few of the rich, or wise, or mighty, are called? Certainly he does not choose them because they are poor; for "he is no respecter of persons;" rather, I think, we may say, that knowing what is in their hearts, the nature of the world through which they are to pass, and what circumstances are best suited to manifest the truth and efficacy of his grace, he has, in the general, chosen poverty as the best

state for them. Some exceptions he has made, that his people may not be wholly without support and countenance, and that the sufficiency of his grace may be made known in every state of life; but, for the most part, they are a poor and afflicted people; and in this appointment he has had a regard to their honor, their safety, and their comfort. I have room for but a very brief illustration of these particulars.

Sanctified poverty is an honorable state; not so, indeed, in the judgment of the world. The rich have many friends; the poor are usually despised. But I am speaking of that honor which cometh from God only. The poor, who are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," are honored with the nearest external conformity to Jesus, their Saviour, who, though he was Lord of all, was pleased, for our sakes, to make himself so poor, that he had not where to lay his head, and submitted to receive assistance from the contributions of his followers, Luke 8:3. By this astonishing humiliation, he poured contempt upon all human glory, and made the state of poverty honorable; and now, "he that reproaches the poor despiseth his Maker." And as he was, so were his apostles in this world. They were not only destitute of rank, titles, and estates,³ but were often in hunger and nakedness, and had no certain dwelling-place. To infer from hence, as some have done, that riches, and the accommodations of life, are unsuitable to the state of a christian, is the mark of a superstitious and legal spirit. There were, in those days, several believers that were in a state of affluence, as, for instance, Theophilus, whom Luke addresses by a title of honor, *KRATISTE* (most noble, or excellent,) the same which St. Paul ascribes to the Roman governor. But we may safely infer, that that state of life in which our Lord was pleased to converse with men, and which was the lot of his apostles, and most favored servants, is honorable in the sight of God.

Again, poverty is honorable, because it affords a peculiar advantage for glorifying God, and evidencing the power of his grace, and the faithfulness of his promises, in the sight of men. A believer, if rich, lives by faith, and his faith meets with various trials. He himself knows by whom he stands; but it is not ordinarily so visible to others, as in the case of the poor. When ministers speak of the all-suf-

ficiency of God to those who trust in him, and the certain effect of the principles of the gospel, in supporting, satisfying, and regulating the mind of man, the poor are the best and most unsuspected witnesses for the truth of their doctrine. If we are asked, Where do these wonderful people live, who can delight themselves in God, esteem a day in his courts better than a thousand, and prefer the light of his countenance to all earthly joy? we can confidently send them to the poor of the flock. Amongst the number who are so called, there are some who will not disappoint our appeal. Let the world, who refuse to believe the preacher, believe their own eyes; and when they see a poor person content, thankful, rejoicing, admiring the Lord's goodness for affording him what they account hard fare, and, in the midst of various pressures, incapable of being bribed by offers, or terrified by threats, to swerve a step from the path of known duty, let them acknowledge that this is the finger of God. If they harden themselves against this evidence, "neither would they be persuaded, though one should arise from the dead."

And as poverty is an honorable, so it is comparatively a safe state. True, it is attended with its peculiar temptations; but it is not near so suitable to draw forth and nourish the two grand corruptions of the heart, self-importance, and an idolatrous cleaving to the world, as the opposite state of riches. They who are rich in this world, and who know the Lord and their own hearts, feel the wisdom and propriety of the apostle's charge, "Not to be high-minded, nor to trust in uncertain riches." If poor believers consider the snares to which their rich brethren are exposed, they will rather pray for and pity, than envy them. Their path is slippery; they have reason to cry continually, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe;" for they live in the midst of the hurries and vanities of the world, are engaged in a large sphere of action, and are incessantly exposed to interruptions and snares. The carriage of all around them reminds them of their supposed consequence; and, by the nature of their situation, they are greatly precluded from plain dealing and friendly advice. But the poor are not surrounded with flatterers, nor teased with impertinencies. They meet with little to stimulate their pride, or to soothe their vanity. They not only believe in their judgments, but are constrain-

ed to feel, by the experience of every day, that this world cannot afford them rest. If they have food and raiment, and grace therewith to be content, they have reason to be thankful for an exemption from those splendid cares and delusive appearances, which are the inseparable attendants of wealth and worldly distinction, and which, if not more burdensome, are, humanly speaking, much more dangerous, and greater impediments to the progress of a spiritual life, than the ordinary trials of the poor.

The believing poor have likewise, for the most part, the advantage in point of spiritual comfort, and that principally in two respects, First, As they are called to a life of more immediate dependence upon the promise and providence of God, (having little else to trust to,) they have a more direct and frequent experience of his interposition in their favor. Obadiah was a servant of God, though he lived in the court of Ahab. He, doubtless, had his difficulties in such a situation; but he was not in want. He had not only enough for himself in a time of dearth, but was able to impart to others. We may believe that he well knew he was indebted to the Lord's goodness for his provision; but he could hardly have so sweet, so strong, so sensible an impression of God's watchful care over him as Elijah had, who, when he was deprived of all human support, was steadily fed by the ravens. Such of the Lord's people who have estates in land, or thousands in the bank, will acknowledge, that even the bread they eat is the gift of the Lord's bounty; yet, having a moral certainty of a provision for life, I should apprehend that they cannot exercise faith in the divine providence, with respect to their temporal supplies, so distinctly as the poor, who, having no friend or resource upon earth, are necessitated to look immediately to their Father, who is in heaven, for their daily bread. And though it is not given to the world to know what an intercourse is carried on between heaven and earth, nor with what acceptance the prayers of the poor and afflicted enter into the ears of the Lord of hosts; yet many of them have had such proofs of his attention, wisdom, faithfulness, power, and love, in supplying their wants, and opening them a way of relief, when they have been beset with difficulties on all sides, as have been, to themselves at least, no less certain and indisputable, I had almost said, no less glo-

rious, than the miracles which he wrought for Israel, when he divided the Red Sea before them, and gave them food from the clouds. Such evidences of the power of faith, the efficacy of prayer, and the truth of the Scriptures (preferable to mountains of gold and silver, and for which the state of poverty furnishes the most frequent occasions,) are a rich overbalance for all its inconveniencies. But,

Secondly, I apprehend that the humble and believing poor have, in general, the greatest share of those consolations, which are the effects of the light of God's countenance lifted up upon the soul, of his love shed abroad in the heart, or of a season of refreshment from his presence. By such expressions as these, the Scriptures intimate that "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" a description of which, those who have tasted it will not require, and those who are strangers to it could not understand. This joy is not always the companion of faith, not even of strong faith; but it is that which a believer, whether rich or poor, incessantly thirsts after; and, in comparison whereof, all worldly good is but vanity and disappointment. The Lord imparts this joy to his people, in season and measure, as he sees fit; but his poor people have the largest share. They have little comfort from the world, therefore he is pleased to be their comforter. They have many trials and sufferings; and he with whom they have to do knows their situation and pressure: he has promised to make their strength equal to their day, and to revive their fainting spirits with heavenly cordials. When it is thus with them, they can say with Jacob, "I have enough;" or, as it is in the original, "I have all." This makes hard things easy, and the burden light, which the flesh would otherwise complain of as heavy. This has often given a sweeter relish to bread and water than the sensualist ever found to be in the most studied and expensive refinements of luxury. Blessed are the poor who are rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to them that love him. They often enjoy the most lively foretastes of the glory which shall be revealed.

Have not you, my friend, found these things true in your own experience? Yes; the Lord has sanctified your crosses, and supported you under them. Hitherto he has helped you, and he will be with you to the end. As you have fol-

lowed him upon earth, you will ere long follow him to heaven. You are now called to sow in tears; there you shall reap in joy, and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes. In the mean time be thankful that he honors you, in appointing you to be a witness for the truth and power of his grace, in the midst of an unbelieving world.

It is true, that even where the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. You have sharp trials, which, for the present, cannot be joyous, but grievous; and you have doubtless felt the depravity of your nature, and the subtlety of Satan, at some times prompting you to impatience, envy, and distrust. But these evils are not peculiar to a state of poverty; you would have been exposed to the same had you lived in affluence, together with many others, from which you are now exempted; for riches and poverty are but comparative terms, and it is only the grace of God that can teach us to be content in any possible situation of life. The rich are as prone to desire something which they have not as the poor; and they who have most to lose have most to fear. That a man's life (the happiness of his life) "consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth," is an aphorism founded upon the highest authority, and confirmed by universal experience and observation.

In a word, you are not poor, but rich. The promises are your inheritance; heaven is your home; the angels of the Lord are ministering spirits, who rejoice to watch over you for good; and the Lord of angels himself is your sun, and shield, and everlasting portion. It is impossible that you, to whom he has given Himself, his Son, his Spirit, his grace, his kingdom, can want any thing that is truly good for you. If riches were so, he could pour them upon you in abundance, as easily as he provides you your daily bread. But these, for the most part, he bestows on those who have no portion but in the present life. You have great reason to rejoice in the lot he has appointed for you, which secures you from numberless imaginary wants and real dangers, and furnishes you with the fairest opportunities for the manifestation, exercise, and increase of the graces he has implanted in you.—Influenced by these views, I trust you can cheerfully say,

What others value I resign;
Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine.

I commend you to the blessing of our covenant God, and to Jesus, our Saviour, who, when he was rich, made himself poor for our sakes, that we, through his poverty, might be rich.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIII.

ON SIMPLICITY AND GODLY SINCERITY.

DEAR SIR,

It would be a happy time if all professors of the gospel could, with the apostle, rejoice in the testimony of their consciences, that they walked in simplicity and godly sincerity. How many evils and scandals would then be prevented! But, alas! too many who name the name of Christ, seem to have hardly any idea of this essential part of the Christian character. A few thoughts upon a subject so little attended to may not be unseasonable. The most advanced in the Christian life have something of this lesson yet to learn; and the greater proficiency we make in it, the greater will be our inward peace, and the more will our light shine before men, to the glory of our heavenly Father.

Simplicity and sincerity, though inseparable, may be distinguished. The former is the principle from which the latter is derived. Simplicity primarily respects the frame of our spirit in the sight of God; sincerity more directly regards our conduct as it falls under the observation of men. It is true, the terms are frequently used indifferently for each other, and may be so without occasioning any considerable mistake; but as they are not precisely the same, it may be proper, if we would speak accurately, to keep this distinction in view.

Some persons, who have been more enamored with the name of simplicity, than acquainted with its nature, have substituted in its stead a childishness of language and manners, as if they understood the word simple only in the mere vulgar sense, as equivalent to foolish. But this infantine softness gives just disgust to those who have a true

taste and judgment of divine things; not only as it is an unnecessary deviation from the common usages of mankind, but because, being the effect of art and imitation, it palpably defeats its own pretences. An artificial, or affected simplicity, is a contradiction in terms, and differs as much from the simplicity of the gospel, as paint does from beauty.

The true simplicity, which is the honor and strength of a believer, is the effect of a spiritual perception of the truths of the gospel. It arises from, and bears a proportion to, the sense we have of our own unworthiness, the power and grace of Christ, and the greatness of our obligations to him. So far as our knowledge of these things is vital and experimental, it will make us simple-hearted. This simplicity may be considered in two respects,—a simplicity of intention, and a simplicity of dependence. The former stands in opposition to the corrupt workings of self, the latter to the false reasonings of unbelief.

Simplicity of intention implies, that we have but one leading aim, to which it is our deliberate and unreserved desire that every thing else in which we are concerned may be subordinate and subservient; in a word, that we are devoted to the Lord, and have, by grace, been enabled to choose him, and to yield ourselves to him, so as to place our happiness in his favor, and to make his glory and will the ultimate scope of all our actions. He well deserves this from us. He is the all-sufficient good. He alone is able to satisfy the vast capacity he has given us; for he formed us for himself: and they who have tasted that he is gracious, know that his “loving-kindness is better than life;” and that his presence and fulness can supply the want, or make up the loss, of all creature-comforts. So likewise, he has a just claim to us that we should be wholly his; for besides that, as his creatures, we are in his hand as clay in the hands of the potter, he has a redemption title to us. He loved us, and bought us with his own blood. He did not hesitate or halt between two opinions, when he engaged to redeem our souls from the curse of the law, and the power of Satan. He could, in the hour of his distress, have summoned legions of angels, had that been needful, to his assistance, or have destroyed his enemies with a word or a look; he could easily have saved himself: but how then

could his people have been saved, or the promises of the Scriptures have been fulfilled? Therefore he willingly endured the cross, he gave his back to the smiters, he poured out his blood, he laid down his life. Here was an adorable simplicity of intention in him; and shall we not, O thou lover of souls, be simply, heartily, and wholly thine? Shall we refuse the cup of affliction from thy hand, or for thy sake? Or shall we desire to drink of the cup of sinful pleasure, when we remember what our sins have cost thee? Shall we wish to be loved by the world that hated thee, or to be admired by the world that despised thee? Shall we be ashamed of professing our attachment to such a Saviour? Nay, Lord forbid it. Let thy love constrain us, let thy name be glorified, and thy will be done by us and in us. Let us count all things loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us not desire any thing thou seest fit to withhold, nor repine to part with what thou callest for; nor even take pleasure in what thou bestowest, unless we can improve it for thee, and ever prefer thy love above our chief temporal joy! Such is the language of the heart that is blessed with gospel-simplicity. It was once the stronghold of sin, the throne of self: but now self is cast down, and Jesus rules by the golden sceptre of love. This principle preserves the soul from low, sordid, and idolatrous pursuits, will admit of no rival near the Beloved, nor will it yield either to the bribes or threats of the world.

There is likewise a simplicity of dependence. Unbelief is continually starting objections, magnifying and multiplying difficulties. But faith in the power and promises of God inspires a noble simplicity, and casts every care upon him, who is able, and has engaged to support and provide. Thus, when Abraham, at the Lord's call, forsook his country, and his father's house, the apostle observes, "He went out, not knowing whither he went." It was enough that he knew whom he followed. The all-sufficient God was his guide, his shield, and his exceeding great reward. So, when exercised with long waiting for the accomplishment of the promise, he staggered not, *OU DIEKRITHE*, he did not dispute or question, but simply depended upon God, who had spoken, and was able also to perform. So likewise, when he received that hard command, to offer up his

son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," he simply obeyed, and depended upon the Lord to make good his own word, Heb. 11:17,18,19. In this spirit David went forth to meet Goliath, and overcame him; and thus the three worthies were unawed by the threats of Nebuchadnezzar, and rather chose to be cast into a burning furnace than to sin against the Lord. And thus Elijah, in a time of famine, was preserved from anxiety and want, and supported by extraordinary methods, 1 Kings 17:4,6.

14. In these times we do not expect miracles, in the strict sense of the word, but they who simply depend upon the Lord will meet with such tokens of his interposition, in a time of need, as will, to themselves at least, be a satisfying proof that he careth for them. How comfortable is it to us, as well as ornamental to our profession, to be able to trust the Lord in the path of duty; to believe that he will supply our wants, direct our steps, plead our cause, and control our enemies! Thus he has promised, and it belongs to gospel-simplicity to take his word against all discouragements. This will animate us in the use of all lawful means, because the Lord has commanded us to wait upon him in them; but it will likewise inspire confidence and hope when all means seem to fail, Hab. 3:17,18. For want of this dependence, many dishonor their profession, and even make shipwreck of the faith. Their hearts are not simple; they do not trust in the Lord, but lean unto their own understandings, and their hopes or fears are influenced by worms like themselves. This causes a duplicity of conduct. They fear the Lord and serve other gods. By their language, at some times, one would suppose they desire to serve the Lord only; but, as if they feared that he was not able to protect or provide for them, they make a league with the world, and seek either security or advantage from sinful compliances. These cannot rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience. They must live miserably. They are attempting to reconcile what our Lord has declared to be utterly incompatible, the service of God and mammon. They have so much sense of religion as embitters their worldly pursuits; and so much regard to the world as prevents their receiving any real comfort from religion. These are the lukewarm professors, neither hot nor cold; neither approved of men nor accepted of God. They can attend upon

ordinances, and speak like Christians; but their tempers are unsanctified, and their conduct irregular and blameable. They are not simple; and therefore they cannot be sincere.

I need not take time to prove, that the effect of simplicity will be sincerity. For they who love the Lord above all, who prefer the light of his countenance to thousands of gold and silver, who are enabled to trust him with all their concerns, and would rather be at his disposal than at their own, will have but little temptation to insincerity. The principles and motives upon which their conduct is formed are the same in public as in private. Their behavior will be all of a piece, because they have but one design. They will speak the truth in love, observe a strict punctuality in their dealings, and do unto others as they would others should do unto them; because these things are essential to their great aim of glorifying and enjoying their Lord. A fear of dishonoring his name, and of grieving his Spirit, will teach them not only to avoid gross and known sins, but to abstain from all appearance of evil. Their conduct will therefore be consistent; and they will be enabled to appeal to all who know them, "that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, they have had their conversation in the world."

To a sincere Christian, that craft and cunning which passes for wisdom in the world appears to be not only unlawful but unnecessary. He has no need of the little reserves, evasions, and disguises, by which designing men endeavor (though often in vain) to conceal their proper characters, and to escape deserved contempt. He is what he seems to be, and therefore is not afraid of being found out. He walks by the light of the wisdom that is from above, and leans upon the arm of almighty power: therefore he walks at liberty, trusting in the Lord, whom he serves with his spirit in the gospel of his Son.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXIV.

ON COMMUNION WITH GOD.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH many authors have written largely and well concerning communion with God, I shall not refer you to books, or have recourse to them myself; but, in compliance with your request, shall simply offer you what occurs to my thoughts upon the subject. I propose not to exceed the limits of a sheet of paper, and must therefore come immediately to the point.

That God is to be worshipped, is generally acknowledged; but that they who worship him in spirit and in truth have real fellowship and communion with him, is known only to themselves. The world can neither understand nor believe it. Many who would not be thought to have cast off all reverence for the Scriptures, and therefore do not choose flatly to contradict the apostle's testimony, 1 John 1:3. attempt to evade its force by restraining it to the primitive times. They will allow that it might be so then; but they pretend that circumstances with us are greatly altered. Circumstances are, indeed, altered with us, so far, that men may now pass for Christians who confess and manifest themselves strangers to the Spirit of Christ: but who can believe that the very nature and design of Christianity should alter in the course of time? And that communion with God, which was essential to it in the apostle's days, should now be so unnecessary and impracticable, as to expose all who profess an acquaintance with it to the charge of enthusiasm and folly? However, they who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, will not be disputed out of their spiritual senses. If they are competent judges whether they ever saw the light, or felt the beams of the sun, they are no less certain that, by the knowledge of the gospel, they are brought into a state of communion with God.

Communion presupposes union. By nature we are strangers, yea, enemies to God; but we are reconciled, brought nigh, and become his children by faith in Christ Jesus. We can have no true knowledge of God, desire towards him, access unto him, or gracious communications from

him, but in and through the Son of his love. He is the medium of this inestimable privilege; for he is the way, the only way, of intercourse between heaven and earth; the sinner's way to God, and God's way of mercy to the sinner. If any pretend to know God, and to have communion with him, otherwise than by the knowledge of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, and by faith in his name, it is a proof that they neither know God nor themselves. God, if considered abstracted from the revelation of himself in the person of Jesus, is a consuming fire; and if he should look upon us without respect to his covenant of mercy established in the Mediator, we could expect nothing from him but indignation and wrath. But when his Holy Spirit enables us to receive the record which he has given of his Son, we are delivered and secured from condemnation: we are accepted in the Beloved; we are united to him in whom all the fulness of the Godhead substantially dwells, and all the riches of divine wisdom, power, and love, are treasured up. Thus, in him, as the temple wherein the glory of God is manifested, and by him, as the representative and high priest of his people, and through him, as the living head of his mystical body the church, believers maintain communion with God. They have meat to eat which the world knows not of, honor which cometh of God only, joy which a stranger intermeddleth not with. They are, for the most part, poor and afflicted, frequently scorned and reproached, accounted hypocrites or visionaries, knaves or fools; but this one thing makes amends for all, "They have fellowship with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

I would observe further, that as the incarnation of that mighty One, on whom our help is laid, was necessary, that a perfect obedience to the law, and a complete and proper atonement for sin, might be accomplished in the human nature that had sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God; so in another view it affords us unspeakable advantage for our comfortable and intimate communion with God by him. The adorable and awful perfections of Deity are softened, if I may so speak, and rendered more familiar and engaging to our apprehensions, when we consider them as resident in him, who is very bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; and who, having by himself purged our sins, is now

seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and reigns, in the nature of man, over all, God blessed for ever. Thus, he who knows our frame, by becoming man like ourselves, is the supreme and ultimate object of that philanthropy, that human affection which he originally implanted in us. He has made us susceptible of the endearments of friendship and relative life; and he admits us to communion with himself under the most engaging characters and relations, as our friend, our brother, and our husband.

They who, by that faith which is of the operation of God, are thus united to him in Christ, are brought thereby into a state of real habitual communion with him. The degree of its exercise and sensible perception on our parts, is various in different persons, and in the same person at different times; for it depends upon the communications we receive from the Lord the Spirit, who distributes to every man severally according to his will, adjusting his dispensations with a wise and merciful respect to our present state of discipline. If we were wholly freed from the effects of a depraved nature, the snares of an evil world, and the subtle temptations of Satan, our actual communion with God would be always lively, sensible, and fervent. It will be thus in heaven: there its exercise will be without obstruction, abatement, or interruption. But so long as we are liable to security, spiritual pride, indolence, an undue attachment to worldly things, and irregular distempered passions, the Lord is pleased to afford, increase, suspend, or renew, the sensible impressions of his love and grace, in such seasons and measures as he sees most suitable to prevent or control these evils, or to humble us for them. We grieve his Spirit, and he withdraws; but, by his secret power over our hearts, he makes us sensible of our folly and loss, teaches us to mourn after him, and to entreat his return. These desires, which are the effects of his own grace, he answers in his own time, and shines forth upon the soul with healing in his beams. But such is our weakness, and so unapt are we to retain even those lessons which we have learned, by painful experience, that we are prone to repeat our former miscarriages, and to render a repetition of the same changes necessary. From hence it is, that what we call our frames are so very variable, and our comfortable sense of divine communion is rather transient than

abiding. But the communion itself, upon which the life and safety of our souls depend, is never totally obstructed; nor can it be, unless God shall be unmindful of his covenant, and forsake the work of his own hands. And when it is not perceptible to sense, it may ordinarily be made evident to faith, by duly comparing what we read in the Scriptures with what passes in our hearts. I say ordinarily, because there may be some excepted cases. If a believer is unhappily brought under the power of some known sin, or has grievously and notoriously declined from his profession, it is possible that the Lord may hide himself behind so dark a cloud, and leave him for a while to such hardness of heart, as that he shall seem to himself to be utterly destitute and forsaken. And the like apprehensions may be formed under some of Satan's violent temptations, when he is permitted to come in as a flood, and to overpower the apparent exercise of every grace by a torrent of blasphemous and evil imaginations. Yet the Lord is still present with his people in the darkest hours, or the unavoidable event of such cases would be apostacy or despair. Psalm 41:11.

The communion we speak of comprises a mutual intercourse and communication in love, in counsels, and in interests.

In love.—The Lord, by his Spirit, manifests and confirms his love to his people. For this purpose he meets them at his throne of his grace, and in his ordinances. There he makes himself known unto them, as he does not unto the world: causes his goodness to pass before them; opens, applies, and seals to them his exceeding great and precious promises; and gives them the Spirit of adoption, whereby, unworthy as they are, they are enabled to cry, "Abba, Father." He causes them to understand that great love wherewith he has loved them, in redeeming them by price and by power, washing them from their sins in the blood of the Lamb, recovering them from the dominion of Satan, and preparing for them an everlasting kingdom, where they shall see his face, and rejoice in his glory. The knowledge of this his love to them, produces a return of love from them to him. They adore him and admire him; they make an unreserved surrender of their hearts to him. They view him, and delight in him as their God, their Saviour, and their portion. They account his favor

better than life. He is the sun of their souls: if he is pleased to shine upon them, all is well, and they are not greatly careful about other things; but if he hides his face, the smiles of the whole creation can afford them no solid comfort. They esteem one day or hour spent in the delightful contemplation of his glorious excellencies, and in the expression of their desires towards him, better than a thousand; and when their love is most fervent, they are ashamed that it is so faint, and chide and bemoan themselves that they can love him no more. This often makes them long to depart, willing to leave their dearest earthly comforts, that they may see him as he is, without a vail or cloud; for they know that then, and not till then, they shall love him as they ought.

In counsels.—The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He deals familiarly with them. He calls them not servants only, but friends; and he treats them as friends. He affords them more than promises; for he opens to them the plan of his great designs from everlasting to everlasting; shows them the strong foundations and inviolable securities of his favor towards them; the height, and depth, and length, and breadth, of his love, which passeth knowledge, and the unsearchable riches of his grace. He instructs them in the mysterious conduct of his providence, the reasons and ends of all his dispensations in which they are concerned, and solves a thousand hard questions to their satisfaction, which are inexplicable to the natural wisdom of man. He teaches them likewise the beauty of his precepts, the path of their duty, and the nature of their warfare. He acquaints them with the plots of their enemies, the snares and dangers they are exposed to, and the best methods of avoiding them. And he permits and enables them to acquaint him with all their cares, fears, wants, and troubles, with more freedom than they can unbosom themselves to their nearest earthly friends. His ear is always open to them; he is never weary of hearing their complaints, and answering their petitions. The men of the world would account it a high honor and privilege to have an unrestrained liberty of access to an earthly king; but what words can express the privilege and honor of believers, who, whenever they please, have audience of the King of kings, whose compassion, mercy, and power, are like his

majesty, infinite. The world wonders at their indifference to the vain pursuits and amusements by which others are engrossed; that they are so patient in trouble, so inflexible in their conduct, so well satisfied with that state of poverty and obscurity which the Lord, for the most part, allots them; but the wonder would cease if what passes in secret were publicly known. They have obtained the pearl of great price; they have communion with God; they derive their wisdom, strength, and comfort, from on high, and cast all their cares upon him, who, they assuredly know, vouchsafes to take care of them. This reminds me of another branch of their communion, namely,—

In interests.—The Lord claims them for his portion; he accounts them his jewels; and their happiness in time and eternity is the great end which, next to his own glory, and in inseparable connexion with it, he has immediately and invariably in view. In this point all his dispensations of grace and providence shall finally terminate. He himself is their guide and their guard: he keeps them as the apple of his eye; the hairs of their heads are numbered; and not an event in their lives takes place but in an appointed subserviency to their final good. And as he is pleased to espouse their interest, they, through grace, are devoted to him. They are no longer their own; they would not be their own; it is their desire, their joy, their glory, to live to him who died for them. He has won their hearts by his love, and made them a willing people in the day of his power. The glory of his name, the success of his cause, the prosperity of his people, the accomplishment of his will, these are the great and leading objects which are engraven upon their hearts, and to which all their prayers, desires, and endeavors, are directed. They would count nothing dear, not even their lives, if set in competition with these. In the midst of their afflictions, if the Lord is glorified, if sinners are converted, if the church flourishes, they can rejoice. But when iniquity abounds, when love waxes cold, when professors depart from the doctrines of truth, and the power of godliness, then they are grieved and pained to the heart; then they are touched in what they account their nearest interest, because it is their Lord's.

This is the spirit of a true Christian. May the Lord increase it in us, and in all who love his name. I have room only to subscribe myself, &c.

LETTER XXV.

ON FAITH, AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

DEAR SIR,

IN compliance with your request, I freely give you my sentiments on the particulars you desired. Your candor will pass over all inadvertencies, when I give you such thoughts as offer themselves spontaneously, and without study. If the Lord is pleased to bring any thing valuable to my mind, I shall be glad to send it to you; and I am willing to believe, that when Christians, in his name and fear, are writing to one another, he does often imperceptibly guide us to drop "a word in season," which, I hope, will be the case at present.

The first object of solicitude to an awakened soul is safety. The law speaks, the sinner hears and fears. A holy God is revealed, the sinner sees and trembles. Every false hope is swept away; and an earnest inquiry takes place, "What shall I do to be saved?" In proportion as faith is given, Jesus is discovered as the only Saviour, and the question is answered; and as faith increases, fear subsides; and a comfortable hope of life and immortality succeeds.

When we have thus "a good hope through grace," that heaven shall be our home, I think the next inquiry is, or should be, How we may possess as much of heaven by the way as is possible? In other words, How a life of communion with our Lord and Saviour may be maintained in the greatest power, and with the least interruption that is consistent with the present imperfect state of things? I am persuaded, dear Sir, this is the point that lies nearest your heart, and therefore, I shall speak freely my mind upon it.

In the first place, it is plain from Scripture and experi-

ence, that all our abatements, declensions, and languors, arise from a defect of faith; from the imperfect manner in which we take up the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Scriptures. If our apprehensions of him were nearly suitable to the characters which he bears in his own word; if we had a strong and abiding sense of his power and grace always upon our hearts, doubts and complaints would cease. This would make hard things easy, and bitter things sweet, and dispose our hearts with cheerfulness to do and suffer the whole will of God; and living upon him and to him, as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, joy, and supreme end, we should live a heaven upon earth. The face of the question is, therefore, a little changed, and amounts to this, What are the means to increase and strengthen our faith?

I apprehend that the growth of faith, no less than of all other graces, of which faith is the root, is gradual, and ordinarily effected in the use of appointed means; yet not altogether arbitrary, but appointed by him who knows our frame, and therefore works in us in a way suited to those capacities he has endued us with.

1. If faith arises from the knowledge of Christ, and this knowledge is only contained in the word of God, it follows, that a careful and frequent perusal of the Scriptures, which testify of him, is a fit and necessary means of improving our faith.

2. If, besides the outward revelation of the word, there must be a revelation of the Spirit of God likewise, whose office it is to take of the things of Jesus, and show them to the soul, by and according to the written word, John 16:14. 2 Cor. 3:18. and if this Spirit is promised and limited to those who ask it, then it follows likewise, that secret prayer is another necessary means of strengthening faith. Indeed, these two I account the prime ordinances. If we were providentially, and not wilfully, restrained from all the rest, the word of grace, and the throne of grace, would supply their wants. With these we might be happy in a dungeon or in a desert; but nothing will compensate the neglect of these. Though we should be engaged in a course of the best conversation, and attend upon sermons from one end of the week to the other, we would languish and starve in the midst of plenty; our souls would grow

dry and lean, unless these secret exercises are kept up with some degree of exactness.

3. Another means to this purpose, is faithfulness to light already received, John 14:15—24. especially ver. 21. It is worth observation, that faith and fidelity, the act of dependence, and the purpose of obedience, are expressed in the Greek by the same word. Though the power is all of God, and the blessing of mere free grace; yet if there is any secret reserve, any allowed evil connived at in the heart and life, this will shut up the avenues to comfort, and check the growth of faith. I lay very little stress upon that faith or comfort which is not affected by unsteady walking.

The experience of past years has taught me to distinguish between ignorance and disobedience. The Lord is gracious to the weakness of his people: many involuntary mistakes will not interrupt their communion with him; he pities their infirmity, and teaches them to do better. But if they dispute his known will, and act against the dictates of conscience, they will surely suffer for it. This will weaken their hands, and bring distress into their hearts. Wilful sin sadly perplexes and retards our progress. May the Lord keep us from it! It raises a dark cloud, and hides the Sun of righteousness from our view; and till he is pleased freely to shine forth again, we can do nothing; and for this, perhaps, he will make us wait, and cry out often, "How long, O Lord! how long?"

Thus, by reading the word of God, by frequent prayer, by a simple attention to the Lord's will, together with the use of public ordinances, and the observations we are able to make upon what passes within us and without us, which is what we call experience, the Lord watering and blessing with the influence of his Holy Spirit, may we grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, be more humbled in our own eyes, more weaned from self, more fixed on him as our all in all, till at last we shall meet before his throne.

The communion of saints, another point you desire my thoughts upon, is the great privilege of all the children of God: they may be separate from each other in body, and yet may daily meet at the throne of grace. This is one branch of the communion of saints, to be present in spirit to each other; sharing in common of the influences of

the same Spirit, they feel the same desires, aim at the same objects, and, so far as they are personally acquainted, are led to bear each other upon their hearts in prayer. It has often been an encouragement to me in a dark and dull hour, when rather the constraint of duty, than the consideration of privilege, has brought me upon my knees, to reflect how many hearts, and eyes, and hands, have been probably lifted up in the same moment with mine. This thought has given me new courage. O what a great family has our Father! and what David says of the natural, is true of the spiritual life, Psal. 104. "These all wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them, they gather: thou openest thine hand, and they are filled with good." Then I particularly think of those who have been helpful to me in time past; the seasons of sweet communion we have enjoyed together, the subjects of our mutual complaints, &c. Where are they, or how engaged, now? Perhaps this moment praying, or thinking about me. Then I am roused to make their case my own, and by attempting to plead for them, I get strength to pray for myself. It is an encouragement, no doubt, in a field of battle, to know that the army we belong to is large, unanimous, all in action, pressing on from every side against the common enemy, and gaining ground in every attack. But if we derive fresh spirits from considering our friends and associates on earth, how should we take fire, if we could penetrate within the vail, and take a view of the invisible world! We should not then complain that we were serving God alone. O the numbers, the voices, the raptures, of that heavenly host! Not one complaining note, not one discordant string. How many thousand years has the harmony been strengthening, by the hourly accession of new voices!

I sometimes compare this earth to a temporary gallery or stage, erected for all the heirs of glory to pass over, that they may join in the coronation of the Great King! a solemnity in which they shall not be mere spectators, but deeply interested parties; for he is their husband, their Lord; they bear his name, and shall share in all his honors. Righteous Abel led the van; the procession has been sometimes broader, sometimes narrowed to almost a single person, as in the days of Noah. After many generations had

successively entered and disappeared, the King himself passed on in person, preceded by one chosen harbinger. He received many insults on his passage; but he bore all for the sake of those he loved, and entered triumphant into his glory.

He was followed by twelve faithful servants, and after them the procession became wider than ever. There are many yet unborn who must, as we do now, tread in the steps of those gone before; and when the whole company is arrived, the stage shall be taken down and burnt.

Then all the faithful chosen race
Shall meet before the throne,
Shall bless the conduct of his grace,
And make its wonders known.

Let us then, dear sir, be of good courage; all the saints on earth, all the saints in heaven, the angels of the Lord, yea, the Lord of angels himself, all are on our side. Though the company is large, yet there is room; there are many mansions;—a place for you; a place, I trust, for worthless me.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVI.

ON THE GRADUAL INCREASE OF GOSPEL-ILLUMINATION.

DEAR SIR,

THE day is now breaking: how beautiful its appearance! how welcome the expectation of the approaching sun! It is this thought makes the dawn agreeable, that it is the pre-sage of a brighter light; otherwise, if we expect no more day than it is this minute, we should rather complain of darkness, than rejoice in the early beauties of the morning. Thus the life of grace is the dawn of immortality; beautiful beyond expression, if compared with the night and thick darkness which formerly covered us, yet faint, indistinct, and unsatisfying, in comparison of the glory which shall be revealed.

It is, however, a sure earnest. So surely as we now

see the light of the Sun of righteousness, so surely shall we see the Sun himself, Jesus the Lord, in all his glory and lustre. In the mean time, we have reason to be thankful for a measure of light to walk and work by, and sufficient to show us the pits and snares by which we might be endangered; and we have a promise, that our present light shall grow stronger and stronger, if we are diligent in the use of the appointed means, till the messenger of Jesus shall lead us within the vail, and then farewell shades and obscurity for ever!

I can now almost see to write, and shall soon put the extinguisher over my candle. I do this without the least reluctance, when I enjoy a better light; but I should have been unwilling half an hour ago. Just thus, methinks, when the light of the glorious gospel shines into the heart, all our former feeble lights, our apprehensions, and our contrivances, become at once unnecessary and unnoticed. How cheerfully did the apostle put out the candle of his own righteousness, attainments, and diligence, when the true Sun arose upon him? Phil. 3:7,8. Your last letter is as a comment upon his determination. Adored be the grace that has given us to be like-minded, even to "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

While I am writing, a new lustre, which gilds the house on the hill, opposite to my study-window, informs me that the sun is now rising: he is rising to others, but not yet to me; my situation is lower, so that they enjoy a few gleams of sunshine before me; yet this momentary difference is inconsiderable, when compared to the duration of a whole day. Thus, some are called by grace earlier in life, and some later; but the seeming difference will be lost and vanish when the great day of eternity comes on. There is a time, the Lord's best appointed time, when he will arise and shine upon many a soul that now sits "in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death."

I have been thinking on the Lord's conference with Nicodemus: it is a copious subject, and affords room, in one part or other, for the whole round of doctrinal or experimental topics. Nicodemus is an encouraging example to those who are seeking the Lord's salvation. He had received some favorable impressions of Jesus; but he was

very ignorant, and much under the fear of man. He durst only come by night, and at first, though he heard, he understood not; but he, who opens the eyes of the blind, brought him surely, though gently, forward. The next time we hear of him, he durst put in a word in behalf of Christ, even in the midst of his enemies, John 7: and at last, he had the courage openly and publicly to assist in preparing the body of his Master for its funeral, at a time when our Lord's more avowed followers had all forsaken him, and fled. So true is that, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord;" and again, "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength."

Hope then, my soul, against hope: though thy graces are faint and languid, he who planted them, will water his own work, and not suffer them wholly to die. He can make a little one as a thousand; at his presence mountains sink into plains, streams gush out of the flinty rock, and the wilderness blossoms as the rose. He can pull down what sin builds up, and build up what sin pulls down; that which was impossible to us, is easy to him, and he has *bid us* expect seasons of refreshment from his presence. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVII.

ON UNION WITH CHRIST.

DEAR SIR,

THE union of a believer with Christ is so intimate, so unalterable, so rich in privilege, so powerful in influence, that it cannot be fully represented by any description or similitude taken from earthly things. The mind, like the sight, is incapable of apprehending a great object, without viewing it on different sides. To help our weakness, the nature of this union is illustrated in the scriptures, by four comparisons, each throwing additional light on the subject, yet all falling short of the thing signified.

In our natural state, we are **KLUDONIZOMENOI KAI PE-**

RIPHEROMENOI, driven and tossed about by the changing winds of opinion, and the waves of trouble, which hourly disturb and threaten us upon the uncertain sea of human life. But faith, uniting us to Christ, fixes us upon a sure foundation, the Rock of Ages, where we stand immovable, though storms and floods unite their force against us.

By nature we are separated from the divine life, as branches broken off, withered and fruitless. But grace, through faith, unites us to Christ the living vine, from whom, as the root of all fulness, a constant supply of sap and influence is derived into each of his mystical branches, enabling them to bring forth fruit unto God, and to persevere and abound therein.

By nature we are **STUGETOI KAI MISOUNTES**, hateful and abominable in the sight of a holy God, and full of enmity and hatred towards each other. By faith uniting us to Christ, we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, and joint communion among ourselves; even as the members of the same body have each of them union, communion, and sympathy with the head, and with their fellow-members.

In our natural estate, we were cast out naked and destitute, without pity, and without help, Ezek. 16: but faith uniting us to Christ, interests us in his righteousness, his riches, and his honors. Our Redeemer is our husband; our debts are paid, our settlement secured, and our names changed.

Thus the Lord Jesus, in declaring himself the foundation, root, head, and husband of his people, takes in all the ideas we can frame of an intimate, vital, and inseparable union. Yet all these fall short of truth; and he has given us one further similitude, of which we can by no means form a just conception, till we shall be brought to see him as he is in his kingdom, John 17:21. "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee: that they also may be one in us."

Well may we say, What hath God wrought! How inviolable is the security, how inestimable the privilege, how inexpressible the happiness, of a believer! How greatly is he indebted to grace! He was once afar off, but he is brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ; he was once a child of wrath, but is now an heir of everlasting life.

How strong then are his obligations to walk worthy of God, who has called him to his kingdom and glory!

I am, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

ANSWER TO THE QUESTION, IN WHAT MANNER ARE WE TO EXPECT THE LORD'S PROMISED GUIDANCE, TO INFLUENCE OUR JUDGMENTS, AND DIRECT OUR STEPS IN THE PATH OF DUTY?

DEAR SIR,

It is well for those who are duly sensible of their own weakness and fallibility, and of the difficulties with which they are surrounded in life, that the Lord has promised to guide his people with his eye, and to cause them to hear a word behind them, saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it," when they are in danger of turning aside either to the right hand or to the left. For this purpose he has given us the written word to be a lamp to our feet; and encouraged us to pray for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, that we may rightly understand and apply it. It is, however, too often seen, that many widely deviate from the path of duty, and commit gross and perplexing mistakes, while they profess a sincere desire to know the will of God, and think they have his warrant and authority. This must certainly be owing to misapplication of the rule by which they judge, since the rule itself is infallible, and the promise sure. The Scriptures cannot deceive us, if rightly understood; but they may, if perverted, prove the occasion of confirming us in a mistake. The Holy Spirit cannot mislead those who are under his influence; but we may suppose that we are so, when we are not. It may not be unseasonable to offer a few thoughts upon a subject of great importance to the peace of our minds, and to the honor of our holy profession.

Many have been deceived as to what they ought to do, or in forming a judgment beforehand of events in which they are nearly concerned, by expecting direction in ways which the Lord has not warranted.—I shall mention some of the principal of these, for it is not easy to enumerate them all.

Some persons, when two or more things have been in view, and they could not immediately determine which to prefer, have committed their case to the Lord by prayer, and have then proceeded to cast lots; taking it for granted, that after such a solemn appeal, the turning up of the lot might be safely rested in as an answer from God. It is true, the Scriptures, and indeed, right reason assures us, that the Lord disposes the lot; and there are several cases recorded in the Old Testament, in which lots were used by divine appointment; but I think neither these, nor the choosing Matthias by lot to the apostleship, are proper precedents for our conduct. In the division of the land of Canaan, in the affair of Achan, and in the nomination of Saul to the kingdom, recourse was had to lots by God's express command. The instance of Matthias likewise was singular, such as can never happen again, namely the choice of an apostle, who would not have been upon a par with the rest, who were chosen immediately by the Lord, unless He had been pleased to interpose in some extraordinary way; and all these were before the canon of Scripture was completed, and before the full descent and communication of the Holy Spirit, who was promised to dwell with the church to the end of time. Under the New-Testament dispensation, we are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace, to make our request known to the Lord, and to cast our cares upon him: but we have neither precept nor promise, respecting the use of lots; and to have recourse to them without his appointment, seems to be tempting him rather than honoring him, and to savor more of presumption than dependence. The effects likewise of this expedient, have often been unhappy and hurtful. A sufficient proof how little it is to be trusted to as a guide of our conduct.

Others, when in doubt, have opened the Bible at a venture, and expected to find something to direct them, in the first verse they should cast their eye upon. It is no small discredit to this practice, that the heathens who knew not the Bible, used some of their favorite books in the same way; and grounded their persuasions of what they ought to do, or of what should befall them, according to the passage they happened to open upon. Among the Romans, the writings of Virgil were frequently consulted upon these occasions; which gave rise to the well-known expression of

the *Sortes Virgilianæ*. And indeed Virgil is as well adapted to satisfy inquirers in this way, as the Bible itself; for if people will be governed by the occurrence of one single text of Scripture, without regarding the context or duly comparing it with the general tenor of the word of God, and with their own circumstances, they may commit the greatest extravagances, expect the greatest impossibilities, and contradict the plainest dictates of common sense, while they think they have the word of God on their side. Can the opening upon 2 Samuel 7:3. when Nathan said unto David, "Do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee," be sufficient to determine the lawfulness or expediency of actions? Or can a glance of the eye upon our Lord's words to the woman of Canaan, Matthew 15: 28. "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt," amount to a proof, that the present earnest desire of the mind (whatever it may be) shall be surely accomplished? Yet it is certain that matters, big with important consequences, have been engaged in, and the most sanguine expectations formed, upon no better warrant than dipping (as it is called) upon a text of scripture.

A sudden strong impression of a text, that seems to have some resemblance to the concern upon the mind, has been accepted by many as an infallible token that they were right, and that things would go just as they would have them; or, on the other hand, if the passage bore a threatening aspect, it has filled them with fears and inquietudes, which they have afterwards found were groundless and unnecessary. These impressions, being more out of their power than their former method, have been more generally regarded and trusted to, but have frequently proved no less delusive. It is allowed, that such impressions of a precept or a promise, as humble, animate, or comfort the soul, by giving it a lively sense of the truth contained in the words, are both profitable and pleasant; and many of the Lord's people have been instructed and supported (especially in a time of trouble) by some seasonable word of grace applied and sealed by his Spirit with power to their hearts. But if impressions or impulses are received as a voice from heaven, directing to such particular actions as could not be proved to be duties without them, a person may be unwarily misled into great evils, and gross delusions; and many

have been so. There is no doubt but the enemy of our souls, if permitted, can furnish us with Scriptures in abundance in this way, and for these purposes.

Some persons judge of the nature and event of their designs, by the freedom which they find in prayer. They say, they commit their ways to God, seek his direction, and are favored with much enlargement of spirit; and therefore they cannot doubt but what they have in view is acceptable in the Lord's sight. I would not absolutely reject every plea of this kind, yet without other corroborating evidence I could not admit it in proof of what it is brought for. It is not always easy to determine when we have spiritual freedom in prayer. Self is deceitful; and when our hearts are much fixed and bent upon a thing, this may put words and earnestness into our mouths. Too often we first secretly determine for ourselves, and then come to ask counsel of God; in such a disposition we are ready to catch at every thing that may seem to favor our darling scheme: and the Lord, for the detection and chastisement of our hypocrisy (for hypocrisy it is, though perhaps hardly perceptible to ourselves) may answer us according to our idols; see Ezekiel 14:3,4. Besides, the grace of prayer may be in exercise, when the subject-matter of the prayer may be founded upon a mistake, from the intervention of circumstances which we are unacquainted with. Thus, I may have a friend in a distant country: I hope he is alive, I pray for him, and it is my duty so to do. The Lord, by his Spirit, assists his people in what is their present duty. If I am enabled to pray with much liberty for my distant friend, it may be a proof that the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to assist my infirmities, but it is no proof that my friend is certainly alive at the time I am praying for him: and if the next time I pray for him I should find my spirit straitened, I am not to conclude that my friend is dead, and therefore the Lord will not assist me in praying for him any longer.

Once more, a remarkable dream has sometimes been thought as decisive as any of the foregoing methods of knowing the will of God. That many wholesome and seasonable admonitions have been received in dreams, I willingly allow; but though they may be occasionally noticed, to pay a great attention to dreams, especially to be guided by them, to form our sentiments, conduct our ex-

pectations upon them, is superstitious and dangerous. The promises are not made to those who dream; but to those who watch.

Upon the whole, though the Lord may give to some persons, upon some occasions, a hint or encouragement out of the common way, yet expressly to look for and seek his direction in such things as I have mentioned is unscriptural and ensnaring. I could fill many sheets with a detail of the inconveniences and evils which have followed such a dependence, within the course of my own observation. I have seen some presuming they were doing God's service while acting in contradiction to his express commands. I have known others, infatuated to believe a lie, declaring themselves assured, beyond the shadow of a doubt, of things which, after all, never came to pass; and, when at length disappointed, Satan has improved the occasion to make them doubt of the plainest and most important truths, and to account their whole former experience a delusion. By these things weak believers have been stumbled, cavils and offences against the gospel multiplied, and the ways of truth evil spoken of.

But how, then, may the Lord's guidance be expected? After what has been premised negatively, the question may be answered in a few words. In general, he guides and directs his people by affording them, in answer to prayer, the light of his Holy Spirit, which enables them, to understand and to love the Scriptures. The word of God is not to be used as a lottery, nor is it designed to instruct us by shreds and scraps, which, detached from their proper places, have no determined import, but it is to furnish with just principles, right apprehensions, to regulate our judgments and affections, and thereby to influence and direct our conduct. They who study the Scriptures, in an an humble dependence upon divine teaching, are convinced of their own weakness, are taught to make a true estimate of every thing around them, are gradually formed into a spirit of submission to the will of God; discover the nature and duties of their several situations and relations in life, and the snares and temptations to which they are exposed. The word of God dwells richly in them, is a preservative from error, a light to their feet, and a spring of strength and consolation. By treasuring up the doctrines,

precepts, promises, examples, and exhortations of Scripture in their minds, and daily comparing themselves with the rule by which they walk, they grow into a habitual frame of spiritual wisdom, and acquire a gracious taste, which enables them to judge of right and wrong with a degree of readiness and certainty, as a musical ear judges of sounds; and they are seldom mistaken, because they are influenced by the love of Christ which rules in their hearts, and a regard to the glory of God, which is the great object they have in view.

In particular cases the Lord opens and shuts for them, breaks down walls of difficulty which obstruct their path, or hedges up their way with thorns, when they are in danger of going wrong, by the dispensations of his providence. They know that their concernments are in his hands; they are willing to follow whither and when he leads, but are afraid of going before him. Therefore they are not impatient. Because they believe, they will not make haste, but wait daily upon him in prayer; especially when they find their hearts most engaged in any purpose or pursuit, they are most jealous of being deceived by appearances, and dare not move farther nor faster than they can perceive his light shining upon their paths. I express at least their desire, if not their attainment: thus they would be. And though there are seasons when faith languishes, and self too much prevails, this is their general disposition, and the Lord, whom they serve, does not disappoint their expectations; he leads them by a right way, preserves them from a thousand snares, and satisfies them that he is and will be their guide even unto death. I am, &c.

LETTER XXIX.

THOUGHTS ON ROM. 8: 19, 20, 21.

DEAR SIR,

The apostle evidently intrôduces this passage in confirmation of what he had said before, ver. 17, 18. The privileges of the children of God are not only great, but sure. Every thing we see confirms our expectation of what God has

promised. The whole frame of nature, in its present state of imperfection, strongly pleads for a future and better dispensation, as necessary to vindicate the wisdom, goodness, and justice of God; and this shall take place when the sons of God shall be manifested, and shall shine forth in the kingdom of their Father. It would be injurious to the honor of God to suppose that things were at first created in the state they are now in, or that they will always continue so, and therefore the creature, which was originally designed to show forth the glory of God, is represented as burdened and groaning till those impediments are removed which prevent it from fully answering its proper end.

Dr. Guyse's proposal of reading the 20th verse (the words *in hope* excepted) in a parenthesis, seems greatly to free the sense from embarrassment. Then the proposition in the 19th and 21st verses will be, "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth in hope for the manifestation of the sons of God; because then the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption," &c. The 20th verse expresses the creature's present state, "It is subject to vanity;" and intimates the cause, "Not willingly but by reason of him who hath subjected the same."

By the *creature* some understand mankind, as the word is used Mark 16:15.; and it is certain that, partly from imperfect tradition, and partly from a general rumor of the prophecies extant among the Jews, the heathens had some confused apprehension of a deliverer from misery; agreeably to which, or rather on account of their need of a saviour, whether they knew it or not, Christ is styled "the desire of all nations." But this does not seem to be the sense; because the creature here is said to be subject to vanity, *not willingly*, and is represented as groaning, travailing, and longing (ver. 22.) for deliverance. But it is so far from being the concurrent desire of all mankind, or indeed the desire of any single person, to obtain freedom from the bondage of sin, that we are naturally pleased with it, and yield a willing subjection. Besides, the period referred to is beyond the present life, and intends not a partial relief here, but a full deliverance hereafter. It seems, therefore, that *creature*, in these verses, and *creation*, in verse 22, as they are both expressed

by the same word in the Greek, are to be taken in the same sense. The whole frame of this lower world, which is now subject to vanity on account of the sin of man, is represented as longing and waiting for deliverance.

The word *ΑΠΟΚΑΡΑΔΟΚΙΑ*, which we render "earnest expectation," is very emphatical; it imports a raising up or thrusting forward the head, as persons who are in suspense for the return of a messenger, or the issue of some interesting event. Compare Judges 5:28, Luke 21:28. It occurs but once more in the New Testament, Phil. 1:20, where the apostle is describing, in one view, the confidence of his hope and the many conflicts and oppositions which were the daily exercise of his faith.

Now it is a frequent beauty in the scripture language to apply human affections to the inanimate creation, and these expressions are to be taken in a figurative sense, as denoting the importance and evidence of what is said. See Gen. 4:11. Isa. 1:2. Luke 19:40. The "earnest expectation of the creature," therefore, teaches us two things, the weight and burden of the evils under which the world groans, and the sure purpose of God to restore all things by Jesus Christ. There is a period approaching when all that is now rough and crooked shall be made plain and straight. The Lord has promised it, and therefore all his works are represented as expecting and waiting for it.

This shall be at "the manifestation of the sons of God." They are now hidden, unknown, unnoticed, and misrepresented, for the most part. Their life is in many respects hidden from themselves, and their privileges altogether hidden from the world; but ere long they will be manifested, their God will openly acknowledge them, every cloud by which they are now obscured shall be removed, and they shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. They have now a gracious liberty; they are freed from condemnation, from the power of sin, from the law as a covenant of works, from the yoke of carnal ordinances, from the traditions and inventions of men, and from the spirit of bondage; yet they suffer much from indwelling sin, the temptations of Satan, and their situation in a wicked and ensnaring world. But they are animated with the hope of a glorious liberty, when every evil, imperfection, and abatement shall cease, when they shall be put in the

full possession of a happiness answerable to the riches of divine love and the efficacy of the blood and mediation of Jesus, and then the curse shall be fully removed from the creation; the Lord shall create all things new, and again pronounce all things good. When they are thus manifested, the creature's expectation shall be answered; it shall be restored to its honor and use. Under what circumstances, and to what particular purposes, this change will take place we know not, but a change worthy of divine wisdom, though beyond the limits of our weak apprehensions, we are warranted from Scripture to expect. It is asserted in this passage, to which, perhaps, we may properly add 2 Pet. 3:13. Rev. 21:1. It would be easy to indulge in vain conjectures upon this subject, but it is more safe to restrain them, and to content ourselves with what is clearly revealed. The hour is coming when all difficulties shall be explained, when the mysterious plan of divine providence shall be unfolded, vindicated, and completed; then it shall appear that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head and restorer of the creation, and how fully, in every sense, he has repaired the ruin brought into the world by sin, and destroyed the works of the devil.

In the meantime the sons of God groan, waiting for their adoption, and the creation groans with them. At present it is subject to vanity. Its original design was to fulfil the will, and to set forth the glory of God; but, by the sin of man, it is disappointed with respect to these ends, not absolutely, for still the heavens declare his glory, and the earth is full of his goodness, but, with regard to outward appearances, there is a great abatement in both these respects. We may instance a few particulars in which the creature is abused and oppressed, contrary to the design of its creation.

The creature was intended to show forth the glory of God; but here it has been disappointed, and has groaned, being burdened in all ages. Vain man has always been disposed to serve and worship the creature more than the Creator. The whole world formerly, except the Jews, were sunk in idolatry, paying divine honors to the sun and moon, yea, to stocks and stones; and a great part of the earth is to this moment covered with the same darkness. When this is the case, the creature groans under vanity,

being perverted directly contrary to its proper end; and there is another idolatry, if not so gross, yet in us more inexcusable, by which the generality of those who bear the name of Christians are no less alienated from the knowledge and love of the true God than the heathens themselves.

Again, the creatures, as the servants of God, are properly designed to promote the welfare of his children, 1 Cor. 3:22. Job. 5:23. This great end is indeed finally secured by the promise, that all shall work together for their good; but at present they are exposed to great sufferings; all things seem to come alike to all. This, on the Lord's part, is a wise and gracious appointment for the exercise of faith, the mortification of sin, and the advancement of sanctification; but still, in itself, it is a vanity under which the creation groans. When Jesus was crucified in person, the sun withdrew his light, rocks rent, and the earth quaked. There is a proportionable constraint upon nature when he suffers in his members. Sometimes this part of the vanity has been suspended, as in the case of Daniel and his companions; and, doubtless, the creatures would in general reverence the Heir of glory, were not the effects of sin upon them continued upon them for wise reasons. They were subject to man, when man was subject to his Maker. At present there is an apparent inconsistency, when beasts, and storms, and seas, rage against those whom the Creator is pleased to favor.

Once more, the creatures of God might be expected to engage in his behalf against his enemies; but it is subject to vanity here likewise. The earth is the Lord's, yet the chief parts and possessions of it are in the hands of those who hate him; yea, his enemies employ his creatures against his own friends. Surely, if the secret powerful restraint of his providence were taken off, it would be otherwise. How ready all the creatures are to fight in the Lord's cause, if he please to employ them, we may learn from the history of Egypt, in Exodus, from the death of Dathan and Abiram, and the destruction of Sennacherib's army. It is therefore a bondage introduced by sin, and under which they groan, that they are compelled to prolong the lives and serve the occasions of ungodly sinners.

The effect being manifest, that the creature is subject to

vanity, the apostle briefly intimates the cause: "Not willingly." The creature, considered in itself, is not in fault. All things were created good in the beginning, and in themselves are good still. Not the fault, but the perversion and subjection of the creature, are here complained of. A beauty, variety, and order in the works of God are still discernible, sufficient to fill an attentive and enlightened mind with wonder, love, and praise; though it must be allowed, that sin has not only alienated our hearts, and disabled our faculties, so that we cannot rightly contemplate God and his works, but has likewise occasioned a considerable alteration in the visible state of things. One instance is expressly specified, Gen. 3:16.

The positive cause is ascribed to "him who has subjected the same." These words may bear three different senses in agreement with the current doctrine of the Scriptures. The prime author of the mischief was Satan. Full of malice and enmity against God and his creatures, he attempted to bring evil into this lower world, and was permitted to succeed; the Lord purposing to over-rule it to his own glory. But, for a season, the work of the devil has been to introduce and maintain a sad scene of vanity and misery. Our first father, Adam, was the direct and immediate cause of the entrance of sin and vanity into the creation. He was created upright, and all things good about him; but he listened to Satan, and sinned, and by his sin

Brought death into the world, and all our wo;

for we were concerned in his transgression, as he was our head, both in nature and law. But we may refer the *him* to God; and this seems best to suit the apostle's design here. God, the righteous judge, subjected the creature to vanity, as the just consequence and desert of man's disobedience. But he has subjected it in hope, with a reserve in favor of his own people, by which, though they are liable to trouble, they are secured from the penal desert of sin; and the vanity of the creature is, by his wisdom, over-ruled to wise and gracious purposes. The earth, and all in it, was made for the sake of man; for his sin it was first cursed, and afterwards destroyed by water; and sin at last shall set it on fire. But God, who is rich in mercy, appointed a

people to himself out of the fallen race. For their sakes, and as a theatre whereon to display the wonders of his providence and grace, it was renewed after the flood, and still continues, but not in its original state; there are marks of the evil of sin, and of God's displeasure against it, wherever we turn our eyes. This truth is witnessed to by every thing without us, and within us. But there shall be a deliverance to those who fear him; and by his word and Spirit he teaches them to receive instruction and benefit even from this root of bitterness. Even now they are the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what they will be when he shall appear, and be admired in all them that believe. Then they shall be manifested, and then the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

How blind, then, are they who expect happiness from the creature, which is itself subject to vanity, and who are meanly content with the present state of things! It is because they are estranged from God, have no sense of his excellency, no regard for his glory, no knowledge of their own proper good. They are farther removed from the desires they ought to have, in their present circumstances, than the brute creation, or the very ground they walk on; for all things but man have an instinct, or natural principle, to answer the end for which they were appointed. Fire and hail, wind and storm, fulfil the word of God, though we poor mortals dare to disobey it. But if the secret voice of the whole creation desires the consummation of all things, surely they who have the light of God's word and Spirit will look forward, and long for that glorious day. Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!

I am, &c.

LETTER XXX.

ON THE RIGHT USE OF THE LAW.

DEAR SIR,

You desire my thoughts on 1 Tim. 1:8. "We know the law is good if a man use it lawfully," and I willingly comply. I do not mean to send you a sermon on the text; yet

a little attention to method may not be improper upon this subject, though in a letter to a friend. Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes. This is the root of self-righteousness, the grand reason why the gospel of Christ is no more regarded, and the cause of that uncertainty and inconsistency in many, who, though they profess themselves teachers, understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm. If we previously state what is meant by the law, and by what means we know the law to be good, I think it will, from these premises, be easy to conclude what it is to use the law lawfully.

The law, in many passages of the Old Testament, signifies the whole revelation of the will of God, as in Psalm 1:2. and 19:7. But the law, in a strict sense, is contradistinguished from the gospel. Thus, the apostle considers it at large in his epistle to the Romans and Galatians. I think it is evident, that, in the passage you have proposed, the apostle is speaking of the law of Moses. But, to have a clearer view of the subject, it may be proper to look back to a more early period.

The law of God, then, in the largest sense, is that rule, or prescribed course, which he has appointed for his creatures, according to their several natures and capacities, that they may answer the end for which he has created them. Thus it comprehends the inanimate creation: the wind and storm fulfil his word, or law. He hath appointed the moon for seasons; and the sun knoweth his time of going down, and going forth, and performs all his revolutions according to his Maker's pleasure. If we could suppose the sun was an intelligent being, and should refuse to shine, or should wander from the station in which God had placed him, he would then be a transgressor of the law. But there is no such disorder in the natural world. The law of God in this sense, or what many choose to call the law of nature, is no other than the impression of God's power, whereby all things continue and act according to his will from the beginning; for "he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

The animals, destitute of reason, are likewise under a law; that is, God has given them instincts, according to their several kinds, for their support and preservation, to

which they invariably conform. A wisdom unspeakably superior to all the contrivance of man disposes their concerns, and is visible in the structure of a bird's nest, or the economy of a bee-hive. But this wisdom is restrained within narrow limits; they act without any remote design, and are incapable either of good or evil in a moral sense.

When God created man, he taught him more than the beasts of the earth, and made him wiser than the fowls of heaven. He framed him for himself, breathed into him a spirit immortal and incapable of dissolution, gave him a capacity not to be satisfied with any creature-good, endued him with an understanding, will, and affections, which qualified him for the knowledge and service of his Maker, and a life of communion with him. The law of God, therefore, concerning man, is that rule of disposition and conduct to which a creature so constituted ought to conform; so that the end of his creation might be answered, and the wisdom of God be manifested in him and by him. Man's continuance in this regular and happy state was not necessary as it is in the creatures, who, having no rational faculties, have properly no choice, but act under the immediate agency of divine power. As man was capable of continuing in the state in which he was created, so he was capable of forsaking it. He did so, and sinned, by eating the forbidden fruit. We are not to suppose that this prohibition was the whole of the law of Adam, so that if he had abstained from the tree of knowledge, he might, in other respects, have done (as we say) what he pleased. This injunction was the test of his obedience; and while he regarded it, he could have no desire contrary to holiness, because his nature was holy. But when he broke through it, he broke through the whole law, and stood guilty of idolatry, blasphemy, rebellion, and murder. The divine light in his soul was extinguished, the image of God defaced; he became like Satan, whom he had obeyed, and lost his power to keep that law which was connected with his happiness. Yet, still the law remained in force: the blessed God could not lose his right to that reverence, love, and obedience, which must always be due to him from his intelligent creatures. Thus Adam became a transgressor, and incurred the penalty, death. But God, who is rich in

mercy, according to his eternal purpose, revealed the promise of the seed of the woman, and instituted sacrifices as types of that atonement for sin, which He, in the fulness of time, should accomplish by the sacrifice of himself.

Adam, after his fall, was no longer a public person; he was saved by grace through faith; but the depravity he had brought upon human nature remained. His children, and so all his posterity, were born in his sinful likeness, without either ability or inclination to keep the law. The earth was soon filled with violence. But a few in every successive age were preserved by grace, and faith in the promise. Abraham was favored with a more full and distinct revelation of the covenant of grace; he saw the day of Christ, and rejoiced. In the time of Moses, God was pleased to set apart a peculiar people to himself, and to them he published his law, with great solemnity, at Sinai. This law consisted of two distinct parts, very different in their scope and design, though both enjoined by the same authority.

The decalogue, or ten commandments, uttered by the voice of God himself, is an abstract of that original law under which man was created, but published in a prohibitory form, the Israelites, like the rest of mankind, being depraved by sin, and strongly inclined to the commission of every evil. This law could not be designed as a covenant, by obedience to which man should be justified; for long before its publication the gospel had been preached to Abraham, Galatians 3:8. But the law entered that sin might abound; that the extent, the evil, and the desert of sin, might be known; for it reaches to the most hidden thoughts of the heart, requires absolute and perpetual obedience, and denounces a curse upon all who continue not therein.

To this was superadded the ceremonial or levitical law, prescribing a variety of institutions, purifications, and sacrifices, the observance of which were, during that dispensation, absolutely necessary to the acceptable worship of God. By obedience to these prescriptions, the people of Israel preserved their legal right to the blessings promised to them as a nation, and which were not confined to spiritual worshippers only; and they were likewise ordinances and helps to lead those who truly feared God, and had con-

science of sin, to look forward, by faith, to the great sacrifice, the Lamb of God, who, in the fulness of time, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. In both these respects, the ceremonial law was abrogated by the death of Christ. The Jews then ceased to be God's peculiar people; and Jesus having expiated sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness, by his obedience unto death, all other sacrifices became unnecessary and vain. The gospel supplies the place of the ceremonial law, to the same advantage as the sun abundantly compensates for the twinkling of the stars, and the feeble glimmering of moon-light, which are concealed by its glory. Believers of old were relieved from the strictness of the moral law by the sacrifices which pointed to Christ. Believers under the gospel are relieved by a direct application to the blood of the covenant. Both renounce any dependence on the moral law for justification, and both accept it as a rule of life in the hands of the Mediator, and are enabled to yield it a sincere, though not a perfect, obedience.

If an Israelite, trusting in his obedience to the moral law, had ventured to reject the ordinances of the ceremonial, he would have been cut off. In like manner, if any who are called Christians are so well satisfied with their moral duties that they see no necessity of making Christ their only hope, the law, by which they seek life, will be to them a ministration unto death. Christ, and he alone, delivers us, by faith in his name, from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.

A second inquiry is, How we come to know the law to be good? for naturally we do not, we cannot, think so. We cannot be at enmity with God, and at the same time approve of his law; rather this is the ground of our dislike to him, that we conceive the law, by which we are to be judged, is too strict in its precepts, and too severe in its threatenings; and therefore men, so far as in them lies, are for altering this law. They think it would be better if it required no more than we can perform; if it allowed us more liberty; and especially if it was not armed against transgressors with the penalty of everlasting punishment. This is evident from the usual pleas of unawakened sinners. Some think, "I am not so bad as some others;" by which they mean, God will surely make a difference, and take fa-

vorable notice of what they suppose good in themselves. Others plead, "If I should not obtain mercy, what will become of the greater part of mankind?" by which they plainly intimate, that it would be hard and unjust in God to punish such multitudes. Others endeavor to extenuate their sins, as Jonathan once said, "I did but taste a little honey, and I must die:" "These passions are natural to me, and must I die for indulging them!" In short, the spirituality and strictness of the law, its severity, and its levelling effect, confounding all seeming differences in human characters, and stopping every mouth without distinction, are three properties of the law which the natural man cannot allow to be good.

These prejudices against the law can only be removed by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is his office to enlighten and convince the conscience; to communicate an impression of the majesty, holiness, justice, and authority, of the God with whom we have to do, whereby the evil and desert of sin is apprehended. The sinner is then stript of all his vain pretences, is compelled to plead guilty, and must justify his Judge, even though he should condemn him. *It is* his office likewise to discover the grace and glory of the Saviour, as having fulfilled the law for us, and as engaged, by promise, to enable those who believe in him to honor it with a due obedience in their own persons. Then a change of judgment takes place, and the sinner consents to the law, that it is holy, just, and good. Then the law is acknowledged to be holy; it manifests the holiness of God; and a conformity to it is the perfection of human nature. There can be no excellence in man, but so far as he is influenced by God's law; without it, the greater his natural powers and abilities are, he is but so much the more detestable and mischievous. It is assented to as just, springing from his indubitable right and authority over his creatures, and suited to their dependence upon him, and the abilities with which he originally endowed them. And though we, by sin, have lost those abilities, his right remains unalienable; and therefore he can justly punish transgressors. And as it is just in respect to God, so it is good for man; his obedience to the law, and the favor of God therein, being his proper happiness; and it is impossible for him to be happy in any other way. Only, as I have

hinted, to sinners these things must be applied according to the gospel, and to their new relation, by faith, to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has obeyed the law, and made atonement for sin on their behalf; so that through him they are delivered from condemnation, and entitled to all the benefits of his obedience. From him likewise they receive the law, as a rule enforced by his own example, and their unspeakable obligations to his redeeming love. This makes obedience pleasing, and the strength they derive from him makes it easy.

We may now proceed to inquire, in the last place, What it is to use the law lawfully? The expression implies, that it may be used unlawfully; and it is so by too many. It is not a lawful use of the law to seek justification and acceptance with God by our obedience to it; because it is not appointed for this end, nor capable of answering it, in our circumstances. The very attempt is a daring impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God; for if righteousness could come by the law, then Christ has died in vain, Gal. 2: 21. 3:21. so that such a hope is not only groundless, but sinful; and, when persisted in under the light of the gospel, is no less than a wilful rejection of the grace of God. Again, it is an unlawful use of the law, that is, an abuse of it, an abuse both of law and gospel, to pretend that its accomplishment by Christ releases believers from any obligation to it as a rule. Such an assertion is not only wicked, but absurd and impossible in the highest degree; for the law is founded in the relation between the Creator and the creature, and must unavoidably remain in force so long as that relation subsists. While he is God, and we are creatures, in every possible or supposable change of state or circumstances, he must have an unrivalled claim to our reverence, love, trust, service, and submission. No true believer can deliberately admit a thought or a wish of being released from his obligation of obedience to God, in whole or in part; he will rather start from it with abhorrence. But Satan labors to drive unstable souls from one extreme to the other, and has too often succeeded. Wearied with vain endeavors to keep the law, that they might obtain life by it, and afterwards taking up with a notion of the gospel devoid of power, they have at length despised that obedience which is the honor of a Christian, and essentially be-

longs to his character, and have abused the grace of God to licentiousness. But we have not so learned Christ.

To speak affirmatively, the law is lawfully used as a means of conviction of sin. For this purpose it was promulgated at Sinai. The law entered, that sin might abound: not to make men more wicked, though occasionally, and by abuse, it has that effect, but to make them sensible how wicked they are. Having God's law in our hands, we are no longer to form our judgments by the maxims and customs of the world, where evil is called good, and good evil, but are to try every principle, temper, and practice, by this standard. Could men be prevailed upon to do this, they would soon listen to the gospel with attention. On some the Spirit of God does thus prevail; then they earnestly make the jailer's inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Here the work of grace begins; and the sinner, condemned in his own conscience, is brought to Jesus for life.

Again, when we use the law as a glass, to behold the glory of God, we use it lawfully. His glory is eminently revealed in Christ; but much of it is with a special reference to the law, and cannot be otherwise discerned. We see the perfection and excellence of the law in his life. God was glorified by his obedience as a man. What a perfect character did he exhibit! yet it is no other than a transcript of the law. Such would have been the character of Adam, and all his race, had the law been duly obeyed. It appears, therefore, a wise and holy institution, fully capable of displaying that perfection of conduct by which man would have answered the end of his creation. And we see the inviolable strictness of the law in his death. There the glory of God in the law is manifested. Though he was the beloved Son, and had yielded personal obedience in the utmost perfection, yet, when he stood in our place, to make atonement for sin, he was not spared. From what he endured in Gethsemane, and upon the cross, we learn the meaning of that awful sentence, "The soul that sinneth shall die."

Another lawful use of the law is, to consult it as a rule and pattern, by which to regulate our spirit and conversation. The grace of God, received by faith, will dispose us to obedience in general; but, through remaining darkness and ignorance, we are much at a loss as to particulars. We

are, therefore, sent to the law, that we may learn how to walk worthy of God, who has called us to his kingdom and glory; and every precept has its proper place and use.

Lastly, we use the law lawfully when we improve it as a test whereby to judge of the exercise of grace. Believers differ so much from what they once were, and from what many still are, that without this right use of the law, comparing themselves with their former selves, or with others, they would be prone to think more highly of their attainments than they ought. But when they recur to this standard, they sink into the dust, and adopt the language of Job, "Behold, I am vile: I cannot answer thee one of a thousand."

From hence we may collect, in brief, how the law is good to them that use it lawfully. It furnishes them with a comprehensive and accurate view of the will of God, and the path of duty. By the study of the law, they acquire an habitual spiritual taste of what is right or wrong. The exercised believer, like a skilful workman, has a rule in his hand, whereby he can measure and determine with certainty; whereas others judge as it were by the eye, and can only make a random guess, in which they are generally mistaken. It likewise, by reminding them of their deficiencies and short-comings, is a sanctified means of making and keeping them humble; and it exceedingly endears Jesus, the law-fulfiller, to their hearts, and puts them in mind of their obligations to him, and of their absolute dependence upon him every moment.

If these reflections should prove acceptable to you, I have my desire; and I send them to you by the press, in hopes that the Lord may accompany them with his blessing to others. The subject is of great importance, and, were it rightly understood, might conduce to settle some of the angry controversies which have been lately agitated. Clearly to understand the distinction, connexion, and harmony, between the law and the gospel, and their mutual suberviency to illustrate and establish each other, is a singular privilege, and a happy means of preserving the soul from being entangled by errors on the right hand or the left.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXI.

ON LOVE TO THE BRETHREN.

DEAR SIR,

THE apostle having said, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you," immediately subjoins, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." By the manner of his expression, he sufficiently intimates, that the want of this love is so universal, till the Lord plants it in the heart, that if we possess it, we may thereby be sure he has given us of his Spirit, and delivered us from condemnation. But as the heart is deceitful, and people may be awfully mistaken in the judgment they form of themselves, we have need to be very sure that we rightly understand what it is to love the brethren, before we draw the apostle's conclusion from it, and admit it as an evidence in our own favor that we have passed from death unto life. Let me invite you, reader, to attend with me a little to this subject.

There are some counterfeits of this love to the brethren, which, it is to be feared, have often been mistaken for it, and have led people to think themselves something, when, indeed, they were nothing. For instance:

There is a natural love of the brethren. People may sincerely love their relations, friends, and benefactors, who are of the brethren, and yet be utter strangers to the spiritual love the apostle speaks of. So Orpah had a great affection for Naomi, though it was not strong enough to make her willing, with Ruth, to leave her native country, and her idol-gods. Natural affection can go no farther than to a personal attachment; and they who thus love the brethren, and upon no better ground, are often disgusted with those things in them, for which the real brethren chiefly love one another.

There is likewise a love of convenience. The Lord's people are gentle, peaceable, benevolent, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. They are desirous of adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, and approving themselves followers of him who pleased not himself, but spent his life in doing good to others. Upon this account they

who are full of themselves, and love to have their own way, may like their company, because they find more compliances, and less opposition from them, than from such as themselves. For a while Laban loved Jacob: he found him diligent and trust-worthy, and perceived that the Lord had prospered him upon Jacob's account; but when he saw that Jacob flourished, and apprehended he was likely to do without him, his love was soon at an end, for it was only founded in self-interest.

A party-love is also common. The objects of this are those who are of the same sentiments, who worship in the same way, or are attached to the same minister. They who are united in such narrow and separate associations may express warm affections, without giving any proof of true christian love; for upon such grounds as these, not only professed Christians, but Jews and Turks, may be said to love one another. Though it must be allowed, that believers, being renewed but in part, the love which they bear to the brethren is too often debased and alloyed by a mixture of selfish affections.

The principle of true love to the brethren is the LOVE OF God, that love which produceth obedience, 1 John 5:2. "By this we know that we love the children of God, if we love God, and keep his commandments." When people are free to form their connexions and friendships, the ground of their communion is in a sameness of inclination. The love spoken of is spiritual. The children of God, who therefore stand in the relation of brethren to each other, though they have too many unhappy differences in points of smaller importance, agree in the supreme love they bear to their heavenly Father, and to Jesus their Saviour; of course they agree in disliking and avoiding sin, which is contrary to the will and command of the God whom they love and worship. Upon these accounts they love one another; they are like-minded; and they live in a world where the bulk of mankind are against them, have no regard to their Beloved, and live in the sinful practices which his grace has taught them to hate. Their situation, therefore, increases their affection to each other. They are washed by the same blood, supplied by the same grace, opposed by the same enemies, and have the same heaven in view;

therefore they love one another, with a pure heart, fervently.

The properties of this love, where its exercise is not greatly impeded by ignorance and bigotry, are such as prove its heavenly original. It extends to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, cannot be confined within the pale of a denomination, nor restrained to those with whom it is more immediately connected. It is gentle, and not easily provoked; hopes the best, makes allowances for infirmities, and is easily entreated. It is kind and compassionate; and this, not in words only, but sympathizes with the afflicted, and relieves the indigent, according to its ability; and as it primarily respects the image of Christ in its objects, it feels a more peculiar attachment to those whom it judges to be the most spiritual, though without undervaluing or despising the weakest attainments in the true grace of the gospel.

They are happy who thus love the brethren. They have passed from death unto life, and may plead this gracious disposition, though not before the Lord, as the ground of their hope, yet against Satan, when he would tempt *them* to question their right to the promises. But, alas! as I before hinted, the exercise of this love, when it really is implanted, is greatly obstructed through the remaining depravity which cleaves to believers. We cannot be too watchful against those tempers which weaken the proper effects of brotherly love, and thereby have a tendency to darken the evidence of our having passed from death unto life. We live in a day when the love of many (of whom we would hope the best) is, at least, grown very cold. The effects of a narrow, suspicious, a censorious, and a selfish spirit, are but too evident amongst professors of the gospel. If I were to insist at large upon the offences of this kind which abound amongst us, I should seem almost reduced to the necessity either of retracting what I have advanced, or of maintaining that a great part (if not the greatest part) of those who profess to know the Lord, are deceiving themselves with a form of godliness, being destitute of its power: for though they may abound in knowledge and gifts, and have much to say upon the subject of christian experience, they appear to want the great, the

inimitable, the indispensable criterion of true christianity, a love to the brethren; without which all other seeming advantages and attainments are of no avail. How is this disagreeable dilemma to be avoided?

I believe they who are most under the influence of divine love, will join with me in lamenting their deficiency. It is well that we are not under the law, but under grace; for on whatever point we try ourselves by the standard of the sanctuary, we shall find reason to say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." There is an amazing and humbling difference between the conviction we have of the beauty and excellence of divine truths, and our actual experience of their power ruling in our hearts. In our happiest hours, when we are most affected with the love of Jesus, we feel our love fervent towards his people. We wish it were always so; but we are poor, inconsistent creatures, and find we can do nothing as we ought, but as we are enabled by his grace. But we trust we do not allow ourselves in what is wrong; and, notwithstanding, we may, in particular instances, be misled by ignorance and prejudice, we do in our hearts love the brethren, account them the excellent of the earth, and desire to have our lot and portion with them in time and in eternity. We know that the love we bear them is for his sake; and when we consider his interest in them, and our obligations to him, we are ashamed and grieved that we love them no better.

If we could not conscientiously say thus much, we should have just reason to question our sincerity, and the safety of our state; for the Scriptures cannot be broken; nor can the grace of God fail of producing, in some degree, its proper fruits. Our Saviour, before whom we must shortly appear as our judge, has made love the characteristic of his disciples; and without some evidence that this is the prevailing disposition of our hearts, we could find little comfort in calling him God. Let not this be accounted legality, as if our dependence was upon something in ourselves. The question is not concerning the method of acceptance with God, but concerning the fruits or tokens of an accepted state. The most eminent of these, by our Lord's express declaration, is brotherly love. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one

another." No words can be plainer; and the consequence is equally plain, however hard it may bear upon many professors, that though they could speak with tongues of angels, had the knowledge of all mysteries, a power of working miracles, and a zeal prompting them to give their bodies to be burned in defence of the truth; yet if they love not the brethren, they are but as sounding brass or tinkling cymbals: they may make a great noise in the church and in the world, they may be wise and able men, as the words are now frequently understood; they may pray or preach with great fluency; but in the sight of God their faith is dead, and their religion is vain.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXII.

ON CANDOR.

DEAR SIR,

I AM with you an admirer of candor, but let us beware of counterfeits. True candor is a christian grace, and will grow in no soil but a believing heart. It is an eminent and amiable property of that love which beareth, believeth, hopeth, and endureth all things. It forms the most favorable judgment of persons and characters, and puts the kindest construction upon the conduct of others that it possibly can, consistent with the love of truth. It makes due allowances for the infirmities of human nature, will not listen with pleasure to what is said to the disadvantage of any, nor repeat it without a justifiable cause. It will not be confined within the walls of a party, nor restrain the actings of benevolence to those whom it fully approves; but prompts the mind to an imitation of Him who is kind to the evil and the unthankful, and has taught us to consider every person we see as our neighbor.

Such is the candor which I wish to derive from the gospel: and I am persuaded, they who have imbibed most of this spirit, will acknowledge that they are still defective in it. There is an unhappy propensity, even in good men, to a selfish, narrow, censorious turn of mind; and the best are

more under the power of prejudice than they are aware. A want of candor among the professors of the same gospel, is too visible in the present day. A truly candid person will acknowledge what is right and excellent in those from whom he may be obliged to differ; he will not charge the faults or extravagancies of a few upon a whole party or denomination. If he thinks it his duty to point out or refute the errors of any person, he will not impute to them such consequences of their tenets as they expressly disavow; he will not wilfully misrepresent or aggravate their mistakes, or make them offenders for a word: he will keep in view the distinction between those things which are fundamental and essential to the christian life, and those concerning which a difference of sentiment may, and often has, obtained among true believers. Were there more candor among those who profess to love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, the emotions of anger or scorn would not be so often felt or excited, by pronouncing or hearing the words, churchman, or dissenter, or Calvinist, or even Arminian. Let us, my friend, be candid; let us remember how totally ignorant we ourselves once were, how often we have changed our sentiments in one particular or other, since we first engaged in the search of truth; how often we have been imposed upon by appearances; and to how many different persons and occurrences we have been indebted, under God, for the knowledge which we have already attained. Let us likewise consider what treatment we like to meet with from others; and do unto them as we would they should do unto us. These considerations will make the exercise of candor habitual and easy.

But there is a candor, falsely so called, which springs from an indifference to the truth, and is governed by the fear of men and the love of praise. This pretended candor depreciates the most important doctrines of the gospel, and treats them as points of speculation and opinion. It is a temporizing expedient to stand fair with the world, and to avoid that odium which is the unavoidable consequence of a steadfast, open, and hearty adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus. It aims to establish an intercommunity between light and darkness, Christ and Belial; and, under a pretence of avoiding harsh and uncharitable judgments, it introduces a mutual connivance in principles and practices, which are

already expressly condemned by clear decisions of scripture. Let us not listen to the advocates for a candor of this sort; such a lukewarm temper in those, who would be thought the friends of the gospel, is treason against God and treachery to the souls of men. It is observable that they who boast most of this candor, and pretend to the most enlarged and liberal way of thinking, are generally agreed to exclude from their comprehension all whom they call bigots; that is, in other words, those who, having been led by divine grace to build their hopes upon the foundation which God has laid in Zion, are free to declare their conviction that other foundation can no man lay; and who, having seen that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, dare no longer conform to its leading maxims and customs, nor express a favorable judgment of the state or conduct of those who do. Candor itself knows not how to be candid to these: their singularity and importunity are offensive; and it is thought no way inconsistent with the specious boast of benevolence and moderation to oppose, hate, and revile them. A sufficient proof that the candor which many plead for is only a softer name for that spirit of the world which opposes itself to the truth and obedience of the gospel.

If a person be an avowed Socinian or deist, I am still to treat him with candor; he has a right from me, so far as he comes in my way, to all the kind offices of humanity. I am not to hate, reproach, or affront him, or to detract from what may be valuable in his character, considered as a member of society. I may avail myself of his talents and abilities in points where I am not in danger of being misled by him. He may be a good lawyer, or historian, or physician; and I am not to lessen him in these respects because I cannot commend him as a divine. I am bound to pity his errors, and to pray if peradventure God will give him repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth; and, if I have a call to converse with him, I should speak with all gentleness and meekness, remembering that grace alone has made me to differ. But I am not to compliment him, to insinuate, or even to admit, that there can be any safety in his principles. Far be that candor from us, which represents the Scriptures as a nose of wax, so that a person may reject or elude the testimonies there given to the deity

and atonement of Christ, and the all-powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, with impunity.

On the other hand, they who hold the Head, who have received the record which God hath given of his Son; who have scriptural views of sin and grace, and fix their hopes for time and eternity upon the Saviour; in a word, all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;—these, I apprehend, if they are prevented from receiving, acknowledging, and loving each other, as he has received, owned, and loved them, are justly chargeable with a want of candor. Shall I be cold to those whom Jesus loves? Shall I refuse them whom he has accepted? I find, perhaps, that they cannot rightly understand, and therefore cannot readily embrace, some points of doctrine in which the Lord has been pleased to enlighten me; that is, I (supposing my knowledge to be real and experimental) have received five talents, and they have as yet obtained but two: must I for this estrange myself from them? Rather let me be careful, lest they be found more faithful and exemplary in the improvement of two talents than I am in the management of five. Again, why should some of those who know, or might know that my hope, my way, my end, and my enemies are the same with theirs, stand aloof from me, and treat me with coldness and suspicion because I am called a Calvinist? I was not born a Calvinist, and possibly they may not die as they are. However that may be, if our hearts are fixed upon the same Jesus, we shall be perfectly of one mind ere long: why should we not encourage and strengthen one another now? O that the arm of the Lord might be revealed, to revive that candor which the apostle so strongly enforces both by precept and example! Then the strong would bear the infirmities of the weak, and believers would receive each other without doubtful disputation.

Once more, however sound and orthodox (as the phrase is) professors may be in their principles, though true candor will make tender allowances for the frailty of nature and the power of temptation, yet neither candor nor charity will require us to accept them as real believers, unless the general strain and tenor of their deportment be as becometh the gospel of Christ. It is to be lamented that too many judge rather by the notions which people express than by the fruits which they produce, and, as they judge of others,

so they often judge of themselves. We cannot have opportunity to say all we could wish, and to all to whom we would wish to say it, upon this subject, in private life; therefore it is the wisdom and duty of those who preach and of those who print, to drop a word of caution in the way of their hearers and readers, that they may not mistake notion for life, nor a form of godliness for the power. The grace of God is an operative principle, and, where it really has place in the heart, the effects will be seen (Acts 11:23.) effects so uniform and extensive that the apostle James makes one single branch of conduct, and that such a one as is not usually thought the most important, a sufficient test of our state before God, for he affirms universally, that if any man seem to be religious, and "bridleth not his tongue, his religion is vain;" and again he assures us, that "whoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy to God:" and to the same purpose, Paul expresses himself on the subject of love (that love which he describes so accurately that none can mistake it unless they willingly deceive themselves:) he declares that, without this love, the brightest knowledge, the warmest zeal, and the most splendid gifts, are *nothing* worth. It is to be feared these decisions will bear hard upon many who have a name to live among the churches of Christ. They are hearers and approvers of the gospel, and express a regard for those who preach it: they will stickle and fight for the doctrines, and know not how to bear those who fall a hair's breadth short of their standard, and yet there is so much levity or pride, censoriousness or worldliness, discoverable in their general behavior, that their characters appear very dubious; and, though we are bound to wish them well, candor will not oblige or warrant us to judge favorably of such conduct, for the unerring word of God is the standard to which our judgments are to be referred and conformed.

In the sense, and under the limitations which I have expressed, we ought to cultivate a candid spirit, and learn from the experience of our own weakness to be gentle and tender to others, avoiding, at the same time, that indifference and cowardice which, under the name of candor, countenances error, extenuates sin, and derogates from the authority of Scripture.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXIII.

(1.) ON MAN IN HIS FALLEN ESTATE.

" Lord, what is Man."

DEAR SIR,

WE hear much in the present day of the dignity of human nature, and it is allowed that man was an excellent creature as he came out of the hands of God; but, if we consider this question with a view to fallen man as depraved by sin, how can we but join with the psalmist in wonder that the great God should make any account of him.

Fallen as man is from his original state of happiness and holiness, his natural faculties and abilities afford sufficient evidence that the hand which made him is divine. He is capable of great things: his understanding, will, affections, imagination, and memory are noble and amazing powers. But view him in a moral light, as an intelligent being, incessantly dependent upon God, accountable to him, and appointed by him to a state of existence in an unchangeable world. Considered in this relation, man is a monster, a vile, base, stupid, obstinate, and mischievous creature: no words can fully describe him. Man, with all his boasted understanding and attainments is a fool. So long as he is destitute of the saving grace of God, his conduct, as to his most important concerns, is more absurd and inconsistent than that of the meanest idiot; with respect to his affections and pursuits, he is degraded far below the beasts; and, for the malignity and wickedness of his will, can be compared to nothing so properly as the devil.

The question here is not concerning this or that man, a Nero, or a Heliogabulus, but concerning human nature, the whole race of mankind, the few excepted who are born of God. There is indeed a difference among men, but it is owing to the restraints of divine providence, without which earth would be the very image of hell. A wolf or a lion, while chained, cannot do so much mischief as if they were loose, but the nature is the same in the whole species. Education and interest, fear and shame, human laws and the secret power of God over the mind, combine to form many characters that are externally decent and respectable, and even the most abandoned are under a restraint which prevents them from manifesting a thousandth part of the

wickedness which is in their hearts; but the heart itself is universally deceitful and desperately wicked.

Man is a fool.—He can, indeed, measure the earth, and almost count the stars; he abounds in arts and inventions, in science and policy; and shall he then be called a fool? The ancient heathens, the inhabitants of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were eminent for this kind of wisdom. They are to this day studied as models by those who aim to excel in history, poetry, painting, architecture, and other exertions of human genius, which are suited to polish the manners without improving the heart; but their most admired philosophers, legislators, logicians, orators and artists, were as destitute, as infants or idiots, of that knowledge which alone deserves the name of true wisdom. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Ignorant and regardless of God, yet conscious of their weakness and of their dependence upon a power above their own, and stimulated by an inward principle of fear, of which they knew neither the origin nor right application, they worshipped the creature instead of the Creator; yea, placed their trust in stocks and stones, in the work of men's hands, in nonentities and chimeras. An acquaintance with their mythology, or system of religious fables, passes with us for a considerable branch of learning, because it is drawn from ancient books written in languages not known to the vulgar; but, in point of certainty or truth, we might receive as much satisfaction from a collection of dreams, or from the ravings of lunatics. If, therefore, we admit these admired sages as a tolerable specimen of mankind, must we not confess that man in his best estate, while uninstructed by the Spirit of God, is a fool? But are we wiser than they? Not in the least, till the grace of God makes us so. Our superior advantages only show our folly in a more striking light. Why do we account any persons foolish? A fool has no sound judgment: he is governed wholly by appearances, and would prefer a fine coat to the writings of a large estate: he pays no regard to consequences. Fools have sometimes hurt or killed their best friends, and thought that they did no harm. A fool cannot reason, therefore arguments are lost upon him. At one time, if tied with a straw, he dares not stir; at another time, perhaps, he can hardly be persuaded to move, though the house were on fire. Are these

the characteristics of a fool? Then there is no fool like the sinner, who prefers the toys of earth to the happiness of heaven; who is held in bondage by the foolish customs of the world, and is more afraid of the breath of man than of the wrath of God.

Again, man in his natural state is a beast, yea, below the beasts that perish. In two things he strongly resembles them; in looking no higher than to sensual gratifications, and in that selfishness of spirit which prompts him to propose himself and his own interests as his proper and highest end. But in many respects he sinks sadly beneath them. Unnatural lusts, and the want of natural affection towards their offspring, are abominations not to be found among the brute creation. What shall we say of mothers destroying their children with their own hands, or of the horrid act of self-murder! Men are worse than beasts, likewise, in their obstinacy; they will not be warned. If a beast escapes from a trap, he will be cautious how he goes near it again, and in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird: but man, though he be often reprov'd, hardens his neck; he rushes upon his ruin with his eyes open, and can defy God to his face, and dare damnation.

Once more, let us observe how man resembles the devil. There are spiritual sins, and from these in their height the Scriptures teach us to judge of Satan's character. Every feature in this description is strong in man; so that what our Lord said to the Jews is of general application, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father that you will do." Man resembles Satan in pride. This stupid, wicked creature values himself upon his wisdom, power, and virtue, and will talk of being saved by his good works; though, if he can, Satan himself need not despair. He resembles him in malice; and this diabolical disposition often proceeds to murder, and would daily, if the Lord did not restrain it. He derives from Satan the hateful spirit of envy: he is often tormented beyond expression, by beholding the prosperity of his neighbors; and proportionably pleased with their calamities, though he gains no other advantage from them than the gratification of this rancorous principle. He bears the image likewise of Satan in his cruelty. This evil is bound up in the heart even of a child. A disposition to take pleasure in giving pain to others ap-

pears very early. Children, if left to themselves, soon feel a gratification in torturing insects and animals. What misery does the wanton cruelty of men inflict upon cocks, dogs, bulls, bears, and other creatures, which, they seem to think, were formed for no other end than to feast their savage spirits with their torments! If we form our judgment of men, when they seem most pleased, and have neither anger nor resentment to plead in their excuse, it is too evident, even from the nature of their amusements, whose they are, and whom they serve; and they are the worst of enemies to each other. Think of the horrors of war, the rage of duellists, of the murders and assassinations with which the world is filled, and then say, "Lord, what is man!" Farther, if deceit and treachery belong to Satan's character, then surely man resembles him. Is not the universal observation, and complaint of all ages, an affecting comment upon the prophet's words, "Trust ye not in a friend, put not confidence in a guide, keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom, for they hunt every man his brother with a net!" How many have at this moment cause to say with David, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords!" Again, like Satan, men are eager in tempting others to sin. Not content to damn themselves, they employ all their arts and influence to draw as many as they can with them into the same destruction. Lastly, in direct opposition to God and goodness, in contemptuous enmity to the gospel of his grace, and a bitter persecuting spirit against those who profess it, Satan himself can hardly exceed them. Herein, indeed, they are his agents and willing servants; and because the blessed God is himself out of their reach they labor to show their despite to him in the persons of his people.

I have drawn but a sketch, a few outlines, of the picture of fallen man. To give an exact copy of him, to charge every feature with its full aggravation of horror, and to paint him as he is, would be impossible. Enough has been observed to illustrate the propriety of the exclamation, "Lord, what is man!" Perhaps some of my readers may attempt to deny or extenuate the charge, and may plead, that I have not been describing mankind, but some of the

most abandoned of the species, who hardly deserve the name of men. But I have already provided against this exception. It is human nature I describe; and the vilest and most profligate individuals cannot sin beyond the powers and limits of that nature which they possess in common with the more mild and moderate. Though there may be a difference in the fruitfulness of trees, yet the production of one apple decides the nature of the tree upon which it grew, as certainly as if it had produced a thousand; so in the present case, should it be allowed that these enormities cannot be found in all persons, it would be a sufficient confirmation of what I have advanced, if they can be found in any; unless it could be likewise proved, that those who appeared more wicked than others were of a different species from the rest. But I need not make this concession; they must be insensible, indeed, who do not feel something within them so very contrary to our common notions of goodness, as would perhaps make them rather submit to be banished from human society, than to be compelled *bona fide* to disclose to their fellow-creatures every thought and desire which arises in their hearts.

Many useful reflections may be drawn from this unpleasant subject. We cannot at present conceive how much we owe to the guardian care of divine providence, that any of us are preserved in peace and safety for a single day, in such a world as this. Live where we will, we have those near us, who, both by nature, and by the power which Satan has over them, are capable of the most atrocious crimes. But he whom they know not, restrains them, so that they cannot do the things that they would. When he suspends the restraint, they act immediately; then we hear of murders, rapes, and outrages. But did not the Lord reign with a strong hand, such evils would be perpetrated every hour, and no one would be safe in the house or in the field. His ordinances of civil government is one great means of preserving the peace of society; but this is in many cases inadequate. The heart of man, when fully bent upon evil, will not be intimidated or stopt by gibbets or racks.

How wonderful is the love of God in giving his Son to die for such wretches! And how strong and absolute is the necessity of a new birth if we would be happy! Can beasts and devils inherit the kingdom of God! The due

consideration of this subject is likewise needful, to preserve believers in an humble, thankful, watchful, frame of spirit. Such we once were, and such, with respect to the natural principle remaining in us, which the apostle calls the flesh, or the old man, we still are. The propensities of fallen nature are not eradicated in the children of God, though by grace they are made partakers of a new principle, which enables them, in the Lord's strength, to resist and mortify the body of sin, so that it cannot reign in them. Yet they are liable to sad surprisals; and the histories of Aaron, David, Solomon, and Peter, are left on record, to teach us what evil is latent in the hearts of the best men, and what they are capable of doing, if left but a little to themselves. "Lord, what is man!"

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXIV.

(2.) ON MAN IN HIS FALLEN ESTATE.

"Lord, what is Man?"

DEAR SIR,

THE nature of fallen man agrees to the description the apostle has given us of his boasted wisdom: it is earthly, sensual, devilish. I have attempted some general delineation of it in the preceding letter; but the height of its malignity cannot be properly estimated, unless we consider its actings with respect to the light of the gospel. The Jews were extremely wicked at the time of our Lord's appearance upon earth; yet he said of them, "If I had not come and spoken to you, ye had not had sin;" that is, as the light and power of his ministry deprived them of all excuse for continuing in sin, so it proved the occasion of showing their wickedness in the most aggravated manner; and all their other sins were but faint proofs of the true state of their hearts, if compared with the discovery they made of themselves, by their pertinacious opposition to him. In this sense, what the apostle has observed of the law of Moses may be applied to the gospel of Christ: it entered, that sin

might abound. If we would estimate the utmost exertions of human depravity, and the strongest effects it is capable of producing, we must select our instances from the conduct of those to whom the gospel is known. The Indians, who roast their enemies alive, give sufficient proof that man is barbarous to his own kind; which may likewise be easily demonstrated without going so far from home; but the preaching of the gospel discovers the enmity of the heart against God, in ways and degrees of which unenlightened savages and heathens are not capable.

By the gospel, I now mean, not merely the doctrine of salvation, as it lies in the holy Scriptures, but that public and authoritative dispensation of this doctrine which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to his true ministers, who, having been themselves, by the power of his grace, brought out of darkness into marvellous light, are, by his Holy Spirit, qualified and sent forth to declare to their fellow-sinners what they have seen, and felt, and tasted, of the word of life. Their commission is, to exalt the Lord alone, to stain the pride of all human glory. They are to set forth the evil and demerit of sin, the strictness, spirituality, and sanction, of the law of God, the total apostacy of mankind; and from these premises to demonstrate the utter impossibility of a sinner's escaping condemnation by any works or endeavors of his own; and then to proclaim a full and free salvation from sin and wrath, by faith in the name, blood, obedience, and mediation, of God manifest in the flesh; together with a denunciation of eternal misery to all who shall finally reject the testimony which God has given of his Son. Though these several branches of the will of God respecting sinners, and other truths in connexion with them, are plainly revealed, and repeatedly inculcated in the Bible, and though the Bible is to be found in almost every house, yet we see, in fact, it is as a sealed book, little read, little understood, and, therefore, but little regarded, except in those places which the Lord is pleased to favor with ministers who can confirm them from their own experience, and who, by a sense of his constraining love, and the worth of souls, are animated to make the faithful discharge of their ministry the one great business of their lives; who aim not to possess the wealth, but to promote the welfare, of their hearers; are equally regard-

less of the frowns or smiles of the world, and count not their lives dear, so that they may be wise and successful in winning souls to Christ.

When the gospel, in this sense of the word, first comes to a place, though the people are going on in sin, they may be said to sin ignorantly; they have not yet been warned of their danger. Some are drinking down iniquity like water; others more soberly burying themselves alive in the cares and business of the world; others find a little time for what they call religious duties, which they persevere in, though they are utter strangers to the nature or the pleasure of spiritual worship; partly, as thereby they think to bargain with God, and to make amends for such sins as they do not choose to relinquish; and partly because it gratifies their pride, and affords them (as they think) some ground for saying, "God, I thank thee, I am not as other men." The preached gospel declares the vanity and danger of these several ways which sinners choose to walk in. It declares and demonstrates, that, different as they appear from each other, they are equally remote from the path of safety and peace, and all tend to the same point, the destruction of those who persist in them. At the same time, it provides against that despair into which men would be otherwise plunged, when convinced of their sins, by revealing the immense love of God, the glory and grace of Christ, and inviting all to come to him, that they may obtain pardon, life, and happiness. In a word, it shows the pit of hell under men's feet, and opens the gate, and points out the way to heaven. Let us now briefly observe the effects it produces in those who do not receive it as the power of God unto salvation. These effects are various, as tempers and circumstances vary; but they may all lead us to adopt the psalmist's exclamation, "Lord, what is man!"

Many who have heard the gospel once, or a few times, will hear it no more; it awakens their scorn, their hatred, and rage. They pour contempt upon the wisdom of God, despise his goodness, defy his power; and their very looks express the spirit of the rebellious Jews, who told the prophet Jeremiah to his face, "As to the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken to thee at all." The ministers who preach it are accounted men that turn the world upside down; and the

people who receive it, fools or hypocrites. The word of the Lord is a burden to them, and they hate it with a perfect hatred. How strongly is the disposition of the natural heart manifested, by the confusion which often takes place in families where the Lord is pleased to awaken one or two in a house, while the rest remain in their sins! To profess, or even to be suspected of an attachment to the gospel of Christ, is frequently considered and treated as the worst of crimes, sufficient to cancel the strongest obligations of relation or friendship. Parents, upon such a provocation, will hate their children, and children ridicule their parents. Many find, agreeably to our Lord's declaration, that from the time a sense of his love engaged their hearts to love him again, their worst foes have been those of their own household; and that they who expressed the greatest love and tenderness for them before their conversion, can now hardly bear to see them.

The bulk of a people will perhaps continue to hear, at least now and then; and to those who do, the Spirit of God usually, at one time or other, bears testimony to the truth. Their consciences are struck, and for a season they believe and tremble. But what is the consequence? No man who has taken poison seeks more earnestly or speedily for an antidote, than those do for something to stifle and smother their convictions. They run to company, to drink, to any thing, for relief against the unwelcome intrusion of serious thoughts; and when they succeed, and recover their former indifference, they rejoice, as if they had escaped some great danger. The next step is, to ridicule their own convictions; and next to that, if they see any of their acquaintance under the like impressions, to use every art, and strain every nerve, that they may render them as obstinate as themselves. For this purpose, they watch as the fowler for the bird, flatter or revile, tempt or threaten; and if they can prevail, and are the occasion of hardening any in their sins, they rejoice and triumph, as if they accounted it their interest and their glory to ruin the souls of their fellow-creatures.

By frequent hearing they receive more light. They are compelled to know, whether they will or not, that the wrath of God hangs over the children of disobedience. They carry a sting in their consciences, and at times feel them-

selves most miserable, and cannot but wish they had never been born, or that they had been dogs or toads, rather than rational creatures. Yet they harden themselves still more. They affect to be happy, and at ease, and force themselves to wear a smile, when anguish preys upon their hearts. They blaspheme the way of truth, watch for the faults of professors, and, with a malicious joy, publish and aggravate them. They see, perhaps, how the wicked die, but are not alarmed; they see the righteous die, but are not moved. Neither providences nor ordinances; mercies nor judgments, can stop them, for they are determined to go on, and perish with their eyes open, rather than submit to the gospel.

But they do not always openly reject the gospel-truths. Some who profess to approve and receive them, do thereby discover the evils of the heart of man, if possible, in a yet stronger light. They make Christ the minister of sin, and turn his grace into licentiousness. Like Judas, they say, Hail Master! and betray him. This is the highest pitch of iniquity. They pervert all the doctrines of the gospel. From election they draw an excuse for continuing in *their* evil ways; and contend for salvation without works, because they love not obedience. They extol the righteousness of Christ, but hold it in opposition to personal holiness. In a word, because they hear that God is good, they determine to persist in evil. "Lord, what is man?"

Thus wilful and impenitent sinners go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The word which they despise, becomes to them a savor of death unto death. They take different courses, but all are travelling down to the pit; and, unless sovereign mercy interpose, will soon sink to rise no more. The final event is usually twofold. Many, after they have been more or less shaken by the word, settle in formality. If hearing would supply the place of faith, love, and obedience, they would do well; but by degrees they become sermon-proof. The truths which once struck them, lose their power by being often heard; and thus multitudes live and die in darkness, though the light has long shone around them. Others are more openly given up to a reprobate mind. Contempt of the gospel makes infidels, deists, and atheists. They are filled with a spirit of delusion to believe a lie. These are scoff-

ers, walking after their own lusts; for where the principles of religion are given up, the conduct will be vile and abominable. Such persons sport themselves with their own deceivings, and strongly prove the truth of the gospel, while they dispute against it. We often find that people of this cast have formerly been the subjects of strong convictions; but when the evil spirit has seemed to depart for a season, and returns again, the last state of that person is worse than the first.

It is not improbable that some of my readers may meet with their own characters under one or other of the views I have given of the desperate wickedness of the heart in its acting against the truth. May the Spirit of God constrain them to read with attention. Your case is dangerous, but I would hope not utterly desperate. Jesus is mighty to save. His grace can pardon the most aggravated offences, and subdue the most inveterate habits of sin. The gospel you have hitherto slighted, resisted, or opposed, is still the power of God unto salvation. The blood of Jesus, upon which you have hitherto trampled, speaks better things than the blood of Abel, and is of virtue to cleanse those whose sins are scarlet and crimson, and to make them white as snow. As yet you are spared; but it is high time to stop, to throw down your arms of rebellion, and humble yourselves at his feet. If you do, you may yet escape; but if not, know assuredly that wrath is coming upon you to the uttermost: and you will shortly find, to your unspeakable dismay, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXV.

WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT,—THINK ON THESE THINGS. Phil. 4: 8.

DEAR SIR,

THE precept which I have chosen for my motto is applicable to many particulars which are but seldom and occa-

sionally mentioned from the pulpit. There are improprieties of conduct, which, though usually considered as foibles that hardly deserve a severe censure, are properly sinful; for though some of them may not seem to violate any express command of Scripture, yet they are contrary to that accuracy and circumspection which become our profession. A Christian, by the tenor of his high calling, is bound to avoid even the appearance of evil; and his deportment should not only be upright as to his leading principles, but amiable and engaging, and as free as possible from every inconsistency and blemish.* The characters of some valuable persons are clouded; and the influence they might otherwise have greatly counteracted by comparatively small faults; yet faults they certainly are; and it would be well if they could be made so sensible of them, and of their ill effects, as that they might earnestly watch, and strive, and pray against them. I know not how to explain myself better than by attempting the outlines of a few portraits, to each of which I apprehend some strong resemblances may be found in real life. I do not wish to set my readers to work to find out such resemblances among their neighbors; but would advise them to examine carefully, whether they cannot, in one or other of them, discover some traces of their own features. And though I speak of men only, counterparts to the several characters may, doubtless, be found here and there among the women: for the imperfections and evils of a fallen nature are equally entailed upon both sexes.

AUSTERUS is a solid and exemplary Christian. He has a deep, extensive, and experimental knowledge of divine things. Inflexibly and invariably true to his principles, he stems with a noble singularity the torrent of the world, and can neither be bribed nor intimidated from the path of duty. He is a rough diamond of great intrinsic value, and would sparkle with a distinguished lustre if he were more polished. But though the word of God is his daily study, and he prizes the precepts, as well as the promises, more than thousands of gold and silver, there is one precept he seems to have overlooked: I mean that of the apostle, *be courteous*. Instead of that gentleness and condescension which will always be expected from a professed follower of the meek and lowly Jesus; there is a harshness in his manner,

which makes him more admired than beloved; and they who truly love him, often feel more constraint than pleasure when in his company. His intimate friends are satisfied that he is no stranger to true humility of heart: but these are few. By others he is thought proud, dogmatic, and self-important; nor can this prejudice against him be easily removed, until he can lay aside that cynical air which he has unhappily contracted.

HUMANUS is generous and benevolent. His feelings are lively, and his expressions of them strong. No one is more distant from sordid views, or less influenced by a selfish spirit. His heart burns with love to Jesus, and he is ready to receive with open arms all who love his Saviour. Yet, with an upright and friendly spirit, which entitles him to the love and esteem of all who know him, he has not every thing we would wish in a friend. In some respects, though not in the most criminal sense, he bridles not his tongue. Should you, without witness or writing, entrust him with untold gold, you would run no risk of loss; but if you entrust him with a secret, you thereby put it in the possession of the public. Not that he would wilfully betray you, but it is his infirmity. He knows not how to keep a secret; it escapes from him before he is aware. So, likewise, as to matters of fact: in things which are of great importance, and where he is sufficiently informed, no man has a stricter regard to truth; but in the smaller concerns of common life, whether it be from credulity, or from a strange and blameable inadvertency, he frequently grieves and surprises those who know his real character, by saying the thing that is not. Thus they to whom he opens his very heart dare not make him returns of equal confidence; and they who, in some cases, would venture their lives upon his word, in others are afraid of telling a story after him. How lamentable are such blemishes in such a person!

PRUDENS, though not of a generous natural temper, is a partaker of that grace which opens the heart, and inspires a disposition to love and to good works. He bestows not his alms to be seen of men; but they who have the best opportunities of knowing what he does for the relief of others, and of comparing it with his ability, can acquit him in good measure of the charge which another part of his

conduct exposes him to. For Prudens is a great economist; and though he would not willingly wrong or injure any person, yet the meanness to which he will submit, either to save or gain a penny, in what he accounts an honest way, are a great discredit to his profession. He is punctual in fulfilling his engagements; but exceedingly hard, strict, and suspicious, in making his bargains. And in his dress, and every article of his personal concerns, he is content to be so much below the station in which the providence of God has placed him, that, to those who are not acquainted with his private benefactions to the poor, he appears under the hateful character of a miser, and to be governed by that love of money which the Scriptures declare to be the root of all evil, and inconsistent with the true love of God and of the saints.

VOLATILIS is sufficiently exact in performing his promises in such instances as he thinks of real importance. If he bids a person depend upon his assistance, he will not disappoint his expectations. Perhaps he is equally sincere in all his promises at the time of making them; but, for want of method in the management of his affairs, he is *always* in a hurry, always too late, and has always some engagement upon his hands with which it is impossible he can comply. Yet he goes on in this way, exposing himself and others to continual disappointments. He accepts, without a thought, proposals which are incompatible with each other, and will perhaps undertake to be at two or three different and distant places at the same hour. This has been so long his practice, that nobody now expects him till they see him. In other respects he is a good sort of man; but this want of punctuality, which runs through his whole deportment, puts every thing out of course in which he is concerned, abroad and at home. Volatilis excuses himself as well as he can, and chiefly by alleging, that the things in which he fails are of no great consequence. But he would do well to remember, that truth is a sacred thing, and ought not to be violated in the smallest matters, without an unforeseen and unavoidable prevention. Such a trifling turn of spirit lessens the weight of a person's character, though he makes no pretensions to religion, and is still a greater blemish in a professor.

CESSATOR is not chargeable with being buried in the

cares and business of the present life, to the neglect of the one thing needful; but he greatly neglects the duties of his station. Had he been sent into the world only to read, pray, hear sermons, and join in religious conversation, he might pass for an eminent Christian. But though it is to be hoped that his abounding in these exercises springs from a heart-attachment to divine things, his conduct evidences that his judgment is weak, and his views of his Christian calling are very narrow and defective. He does not consider, that waiting upon God in the public and private ordinances is designed, not to excuse us from a discharge of the duties of civil life, but to instruct, strengthen, and qualify us for their performance. His affairs are in disorder, and his family and connexions are likely to suffer by his indolence. He thanks God that he is not worldly-minded; but he is an idle and unfaithful member of society, and causes the way of truth to be evil spoken of. Of such the apostle has determined, that "if any man will not work, neither should he eat."

CURIOSUS is upright and unblameable in his general deportment, and no stranger to the experiences of a true Christian. His conversation upon these subjects is often satisfactory and edifying. He would be a much more agreeable companion, were it not for an impertinent desire of knowing every body's business, and the grounds of every hint that is occasionally dropped in discourse where he is present. This puts him upon asking a multiplicity of needless and improper questions, and obliges those who know him to be continually upon their guard, and to treat him with reserve. He catechises even strangers, and is unwilling to part with them till he is punctually informed of all their connexions, employments, and designs. For this idle curiosity he is marked and avoided as a busy-body; and they who have the best opinion of him, cannot but wonder, that a man, who appears to have so many better things to employ his thoughts, should find leisure to amuse himself with what does not at all concern him. Were it not for the rules of civility, he would be affronted every day: and if he would attend to the cold and evasive answers he receives to his inquiries, or even to the looks with which they are accompanied, he might learn, that, though he means

no harm, he appears to a great disadvantage, and that this prying disposition is very displeasing.

QUERULUS wastes much of his precious time in declaiming against the management of public affairs, though he has neither access to the springs which move the wheels of government, nor influence either to accelerate or retard their motions. Our national concerns are no more affected by the remonstrances of Querulus, than the heavenly bodies are by the disputes of astronomers. While the newspapers are the chief sources of his intelligence, and his situation precludes him from being a competent judge, either of matters of fact, or matters of right, why should Querulus trouble himself with politics? This would be a weakness, if we consider him only as a member of society; but if we consider him as a Christian, it is worse than weakness; it is a sinful conformity to the men of the world, who look no farther than to second causes, and forget that the Lord reigns. If a Christian be placed in a public sphere of action, he should undoubtedly be faithful to his calling, and endeavor, by all lawful methods, to transmit our privileges to posterity; but it would be better for Querulus to let the dead bury their dead. There are people enough to make a noise about political matters, who know not how to employ their time to better purpose. Our Lord's kingdom is not of this world; and most of his people may do their country much more essential service by pleading for it in prayer, than by finding fault with things which they have no power to alter. If Querulus had opportunity of spending a few months under some of the governments upon the continent, I may indeed say, under any of them, he would probably bring home with him a more grateful sense of the Lord's goodness to him, in appointing his lot in Britain. As it is, his zeal is not only unprofitable to others, but hurtful to himself. It embitters his spirit, it diverts his thoughts from things of greater importance, and prevents him from feeling the value of those blessings, civil and religious, which he actually possesses; and could he, as he wishes, prevail on many to act in the same spirit, the governing powers might be irritated to take every opportunity of abridging that religious liberty which we are favored with, above all the nations upon earth. Let me

remind Querulus, that the hour is approaching, when many things, which at present too much engross his thoughts, and inflame his passions, will appear as foreign to him, as what is now transacting among the Tartars or Chinese.

Other improprieties of conduct, which lessen the influence and spot the profession of some who wish well to the cause of Christ, might be enumerated, but these may suffice for a specimen.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVI.

TO A GAY FRIEND, ON HIS RECOVERY FROM ILLNESS.

DEAR SIR,

I SUPPOSE you will receive many congratulations on your recovery from your late dangerous illness; most of them, perhaps, more sprightly, and better turned, but none, I persuade myself, more sincere and affectionate than mine. I beg you would prepare yourself, by this good opinion of me, before you read further; and let the reality of my regard excuse what you may dislike in my manner of expressing it.

When a person is returned from a doubtful, distant voyage, we are naturally led to inquire into the incidents he has met with, and the discoveries he has made. Indulge me in a curiosity of this kind, especially as my affection gives me an interest and concern in the event. You have been, my friend, upon the brink, the very edge, of an eternal state; but God has restored you back to the world again. Did you meet with, or have you brought back, nothing new? Did nothing occur to stop or turn your usual train of thought? Were your apprehensions of invisible things exactly the same in the height of your disorder, when you were cut off from the world, and all its engagements; as when you were in perfect health, and in the highest enjoyment of your own inclinations? If you answer me, "Yes, all things are just the same as formerly, the difference between sickness and health only excepted;" I am at a loss how to reply. I can only sigh and wonder: sigh that

it should be thus with any, that it should be thus with you, whom I dearly love; and wonder, since this unhappy case, strange as it seems in one view, is yet so frequent, why it was not always thus with myself; for long and often it was just so. Many a time, when sickness had brought me, as we say, to death's door, I was as easy and insensible as the sailor, who, in the height of a storm, should presume to sleep upon the top of the mast, quite regardless that the next tossing wave might plunge him into the raging ocean, beyond all possibility of relief. But at length a day came, which, though the most terrible day I ever saw, I can now look back upon with thankfulness and pleasure: I say the time came, when, in such a helpless extremity, and under the expectation of immediate death, it pleased God to command the vail from my eyes, and I saw things, in some measure, as they really were. Imagine with yourself, a person trembling upon the point of a dreadful precipice, a powerful and inexorable enemy eager to push him down, and an assemblage of all that is horrible waiting at the bottom for his fall; even this will give you but a faint representation of the state of my mind at that time. Believe me, it was not a whim, or a dream, which changed my sentiments and conduct, but a powerful conviction, which will not admit the least doubt; an evidence which, like that I have of my own existence, I cannot call in question, without contradicting all my senses. And though my case was, in some respects, uncommon, yet something like it is known by one and another every day; and I have myself conversed with many, who, after a course of years spent in defending deistical principles, or indulging libertine practices, when they have thought themselves confirmed in their schemes by the cool assent of what they then deemed impartial reason, have been, like me, brought to glory in the cross of Christ, and to live by that faith which they had before slighted and opposed. By these instances, I know that nothing is too hard for the Almighty. The same power which humbled me, can undoubtedly bring down the most haughty infidel upon earth. And as I likewise knew, that, to show his power, he is often pleased to make use of weak instruments, I am encouraged, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty of succeeding, to warn those, over whom friendship or affection gives me any influence, of the evil

and the danger of a course of life formed upon the prevailing maxims of the world. So far as I neglect this, I am unfaithful in my professions, both to God and man.

I shall not at present trouble you in an argumentative way. If by dint of reasoning I could effect some change in your notions, my arguments, unless applied by a superior power, would still leave your heart unchanged and untouched. A man may give his assent to the gospel, and be able to defend it against others, and yet not have his own spirit truly influenced by it. This thought I shall leave with you, that if your scheme be not true to a demonstration, it must necessarily be false; for the issue is too important to make a doubt on the dangerous side tolerable. If the Christian could possibly be mistaken, he is still upon equal terms with those who pronounce him to be so: but if the deist be wrong, (that is, if we are in the right,) the consequence to him must be unavoidable and intolerable. This, you will say, is a trite argument: I own it; but, beaten as it is, it will never be worn out or answered.

Permit me to remind you that the points in debate between us are already settled in themselves, and that our talking cannot alter or affect the nature of things, for they will be as they are, whatever apprehensions we may form of them; and remember, likewise, that we must all, each one for himself, experience on which side the truth lies. I used a wrong word when I spoke of your *recovery*: my dear friend, look upon it only as a *reprieve*, for you carry the sentence of death about with you still, and, unless you should be cut off (which God of his mercy forbid!) by a sudden stroke, you will as surely lie upon a death-bed as you have been now raised from a bed of sickness; and remember likewise, (how can I bear to write it!) that should you neglect my admonitions, they will, notwithstanding, have an effect upon you, though not such an effect as I could wish: they will render you more inexcusable. I have delivered my own soul by faithfully warning you: but if you will not examine the matter with that seriousness it calls for: if you will not look up to God, the former of your body, and the preserver of your spirit, for direction and assistance how to please him; if you will have your reading and conversation only on one side of the question;

if you determine to let afflictions and dangers, mercies and deliverances, all pass without reflection and improvement; if you will spend your life as though you thought you were sent into the world only to eat, sleep, and play, and, after a course of years, be extinguished like the snuff of a candle, —why, then, you must abide the consequences. But assuredly, sooner or later, God will meet you. My hearty daily prayer is, that it may be in a way of mercy, and that you may be added to the number of the trophies of his invincible grace.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVII.

SOME POINTS OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE CONSIDERED.

TO A FRIEND.

DEAR SIR,

I TRUST the difference of our sentiments, since we are agreed in the one thing needful, will no more interrupt our union and fellowship than the difference of our features or the tone of our voices. I wish you to believe that I would be no advocate for carelessness or formality. I hope my conscience bears me witness that, besides trusting in the letter of Scripture, I likewise desire an increase of that inward and comfortable sense of divine things, in which I believe you are happy; and that I wish not only to be a subject of the kingdom of Jesus, but likewise to have that kingdom powerfully set up in my heart, which consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Indeed I see not how these can be distinguished, or what ground I could have to think myself a subject of his kingdom, unless I earnestly desire to have that kingdom in all its branches and blessings flourishing in my soul. I do not know that I live in the neglect of any means appointed of God for my growth in these blessings, or willingly allow myself in what is inconsistent with them. I think my heart is habitually in the pursuit of them, and that there is seldom an hour in any day when lively communion with

my God, in Christ, is not present to my view as the chief good. To this purpose, through grace, I can venture to express myself to man, though still it is true, when I come before the Lord, notwithstanding the diligence and circumspection I would aim at, I see myself a poor inconsistent creature, that my strength is perfect weakness, and all I have is sin. I confess I am afraid of fixing the criterion of a work of grace too high, lest the mourners in Zion should be discouraged, because I find it is the will of God that such should not be discouraged, but comforted; and because it appears to me that the scriptural marks have respect rather to desires, if real, than to attainments, or at least to those attainments which are often possessed by persons who are kept very short of sensible comforts, Matth. 5:3—9. Luke 18:12,13. 1 Pet. 2:7.

The points between you and me seem chiefly the following: 1. When may a person be properly denominated a believer? 2. What are the proper evidences and necessary concomitants of a lively, thriving frame of spirit? 3. Whether such a degree of faithfulness to light received as is consistent with the remnant of a depraved nature in our present state, will certainly and always preserve our souls from declensions and winter-seasons? 4. Whether that gracious humility which arises from a due sense of our own vileness, and of the riches of divine grace, be ordinarily attainable without some mortifying experiences of the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of our own hearts? A few lines upon each of these particulars will, I think, take in the chief parts of your letter.

1. We differ something with respect to what constitutes a believer. I own nothing has surprised me more, in the course of our friendly debate, than your supposing that a person should date his conversion and his commencing a believer from the time of his receiving the gospel-truths with that clearness and power as to produce in him an abiding assurance. The apostle, in Eph. 1:13. makes a plain distinction between believing and being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. By the experience and observation of many years, I have been more and more persuaded, that to represent assurance as being of the essence of faith is not agreeable to Scripture, which, in many places, either expressly asserts or strongly intimates the contrary, John

1:50. and 20:29. Rom. 10:9. 1 John 5:1. Whoever is not a believer must be an unbeliever; there can be no medium. Either there are many believers who have not assurance, or else there are many unbelievers who love the Lord Jesus, hate sin, are poor in spirit, and adorn the doctrine of the gospel by their temper and conversation; and I doubt not but those who now have assurance, had, before they attained it, a something which wrought by love, and overcame the world. I know no principle capable of these effects but faith, which, though at first it be like a grain of mustard-seed, is the seed of God: though it be faint, it is genuine, as the dawning of light is of the same nature with that which flows from the noon-day sun. I allow that, while faith is weak, there may be little solid comfort, if by that expression abiding comfort be meant. Faith gives safety and spiritual life; abiding peace and establishment follow the sealing of the Spirit. But though an infant has not the strength, activity, and understanding, which he will attain when he arrives to the age of manhood, he is as fully possessed of a principle of life while he is an infant as at any time afterwards.

2. We seem to differ likewise as to the marks of a lively, thriving spirit; at least if any are supposed to be better or surer than those to which our Lord has promised his blessedness, Matth. 5:3—9. He has said, "Blessed are they that mourn;" but he has not said, More blessed are they that are comforted. They are, to be sure, more happy at present; but their blessedness consists not in their present comforts, but in those perceptions of gospel-truths which form them to that contrite spirit in which God delighteth, Is. 57:18. and which make them capable of divine comforts, and spiritual hungering and thirsting after them. Perhaps we do not argue *ad idem*; we may mean different things. I would not represent myself as a stranger to peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. In the midst of all my conflicts I have a heartfelt satisfaction from the gospel, which nothing else could give. But I mean, though this be with me as an abiding principle, it rarely affords me what I think you intend when you speak of sensible comforts. I cannot feel that warmth of heart, that glowing of love, which the knowledge of such a Saviour should inspire. I account it my sin, and I feel it my burden, that I cannot. And when

I truly do this, when I can abhor myself for my stupidity, mourn over it, and humbly look up to the Lord for relief against it, I judge my soul to be at such times as much alive to God as it would be if he saw fit to increase my comfort. Let me always either rejoice in him or mourn after him: I would leave the alternative to him, who knows best how to suit his dispensations to my state; and I trust he that knows I do not say this because I set a small value upon his presence. As to the experience of the apostles, I believe they were patterns to all succeeding believers: but, with some regard to the several trials and services to which we may be called in this world, he distributes severally to all his people according to his own will, yet with a wise and gracious accommodation to the circumstances and situations of each. The apostle Paul connects the abounding of his consolations with the abounding of his afflictions, and with the state of the people to whom he preached, 2 Cor. 1:4—7. and if, instead of preaching the gospel from Jerusalem to Illyricum, in the face of persecution, he had lived in a land of liberty, and been confined to a parochial cure, for aught I know, his cup might not have run over so often. Succeeding ministers of the gospel, when called to very laborious and painful services, have, for the like reasons, been often favored with a double portion of that joy which makes hard things easy, and bitter things sweet; and, in general, all the Lord's people who walk humbly before him, may expect that in, or after seasons of great trial, and in proportion to their pressures, he will favor them with peculiar comforts. It is in this way he, in a great measure, fulfils his promise of making their strength equal to their day; and I am enabled to trust him in this matter, that if he should, at any time, see fit to call me to a more difficult and dangerous sphere of service, or lead me into the furnace of affliction, he would, if he saw it needful, support and refresh me by such manifestations of his glory and love as I know but little of at present. In a word, an humble, dependent frame of spirit, perseverance in the use of appointed means, care to avoid all occasions of sin, an endeavor to glorify God in our callings, and an eye to Jesus as our all in all;—these things are to me sure indications that the soul is right, that the Lord is present,

and that grace is thriving and in exercise, whether sensible consolations abound or not.

3. I propose the third question, concerning such a degree of faithfulness to light received, as is consistent with the remnants of a depraved nature, because I apprehend one effect of indwelling sin is, to render it morally impossible for us to be entirely faithful to that light and power which God has given us. It may sound like a contradiction, to say we cannot do what we can do; but there are many enigmas in a believer's experience, at least in mine; and I never expect to meet the man that knows his own heart, that will say he is always faithful, diligent, and obedient, to the full extent of his ability; I rather expect he would confess with me, that he feels a need of more ability, and fresh supplies of grace, to enable him to make a better improvement of what he had already received. If some, as you suppose, in their dullest frames, can read the Bible, go to the throne of grace, and mourn (as they ought) over what is amiss, I must say for myself, I can, and I cannot. Without doubt I can take the Bible in my hand, and force myself to read it; I can kneel down, and I can see I ought to mourn; but to understand and attend to what I read, to engage my heart in prayer, or to be duly humbled under the sense of so dark and dissipated a state of mind; these things, at some seasons, I can no more do than I can raise the dead, and yet I cannot plead positive inability: I am satisfied that what prevents me is my sin, but it is the sin of my nature, the sin that dwelleth in me; and I expect it will be thus with me at times, in a greater or less degree, till this body of sin shall be wholly destroyed. Yet I believe the Lord is with me, even when he seems to be absent, otherwise my corruptions, at such seasons, might easily prevail to betray me into open or allowed sin, which, blessed be the grace and care of my good Shepherd, is not the case. I know not if I rightly understand the expression, "We may humbly hope, that those things we fall into, which are not in our power to prevent, will not be set to our account." The least of the evils I feel, and which seem most involuntary, if set to my account, would ruin me; and I trust that even my worst deviations shall not appear against me, because I am a be-

liever in Jesus; and I know, and am sure, that I do not wish to continue in sin that grace may abound. My conscience bears me witness, that I would not desire the rule of duty to be narrowed or accommodated to my imperfections in a single instance. If the expression only means, that these unavoidable effects of our evil nature should not break our peace of conscience, or discourage us in our approaches to God, I am of the same mind; through mercy I have seldom any more doubt of my acceptance in the Beloved when in a dark frame, than when I am most favored with liberty.

4. Whether true evangelical humility, and an enlarged view of the grace of God in Christ, triumphing over all obstacles, be ordinarily attainable without an experience of declensions, backslidings, and repeated forgiveness, is the last question I shall consider. I dare say you will do me justice to believe, that I would not advise any one to run into sin in order to get a knowledge of his own heart. David broke his bones thereby: he obtained an affecting proof of his inability of standing in his own strength, and of the skill and goodness of his Physician who healed him; yet no man in his wits would break his bones for the sake of making experiments, if he were ever so sure they would be well set again. You think that a believer is never more humble in his own eyes, or admires Jesus more, than when he is filled with joy and peace. I readily allow, that the present impressions of divine love are humbling: however, the direct tendency of gracious consolations in themselves is one thing; what evils they may afterwards occasion, through the desperate depravity of our hearts, is another. We have a memorable case in point to explain my meaning. The apostle Paul's recollection of his course while in a natural state, and the singular manner of his conversion, were evidently suited to make him an humble Christian, and he was so. By an especial favor of the Lord, he was afterwards taken up into the third heaven: what he saw or heard there he has not told us; but surely he met with nothing that could have a tendency to make him proud; doubtless he saw Jesus in his glory, and the humble spiritual worship of heaven; a sight which we might deem sufficient to make him walk in self-abasement all the days of his life: but Paul, though an eminent saint, was still

liable to the effects of indwelling sin; he was in danger of being exalted through the abundance of revelations, and the Lord, his wise and gracious keeper, saw fit, in order to prevent it, that a messenger from Satan should be given him to buffet him. Pride is so subtle, that it can gather strength even from those gracious manifestations which seem directly calculated to mortify it; so dangerous, that a messenger from Satan himself may be esteemed a mercy, if over-ruled and sanctified by the Lord, to make or keep us more humble: therefore, though we can never be too earnest in striving against sin, too watchful in abstaining from all appearance of evil, and though they who wait upon the Lord may comfortably hope that he will preserve them from such things as would dishonor their profession in the sight of men, yet I apprehend they who appear most to adorn the gospel in their outward conversation, are conscious of many things between the Lord and their own souls which covers them with shame, and that his tenderness and mercy to them, notwithstanding their perverseness, constrains *them* with admiration to adopt the language of Micah, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?" and I believe likewise, that, without such striking and repeated proofs of what is in their hearts, they would not so feelingly enter into the spirit of Job's confession, "Behold, I am vile!" nor would they have such a lively sense of their obligations to the merciful care and faithfulness of their great Shepherd, or of their entire and absolute dependence upon him, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I find these considerations necessary to reconcile me to my lot. The Lord knows what I need, and what I can bear: gladly would I receive, earnestly would I desire, more of comforts while here; but if I mourn now, I hope to be comforted in heaven. In the mean time, it is more immediately necessary for me, both as a Christian and as a minister, that I should be humbled; the Lord's will be done. I cannot pretend to determine what ministers, or what body of people, come nearest the character of the primitive times; but, in my judgment, they are the happiest who have the lowest thoughts of themselves, and in whose eyes Jesus is most glorious and precious. I am, &c.

LETTER XXXVIII.

THAT TRUE RELIGION IS NECESSARY, IN ORDER TO THE
BEST ENJOYMENT OF THE PLEASURES OF THE PRESENT
LIFE.

TO A GAY FRIEND.

DEAR SIR,

THOUGH I truly love you, and have no reason to doubt of the reality of your friendship to me, yet I cannot but apprehend, that notwithstanding our mutual regard, and my frequent attempts to be witty, if I could, for your diversion, there is a something in most of my letters (which I cannot, dare not, wholly suppress,) that disgusts and wearies you, and makes you less inclined to keep up a frequent intercourse than you would otherwise be. Rather than lose you quite, I will in general spare you as much as I can; but at present you must bear with me, and allow me full scope. You have given me a challenge, which I know not how to pass over; and since you so far justify my preaching, as to condescend to preach (in your way) yourself, permit me, for this time, to preach again, and to take some passages in your letter for my text.

In the present debate, I will accept your compliment; and suppose myself to be, as you say, a man of sense. You allow, then, that all the sense is not on your side. This, indeed, you cannot deny; for whatever becomes of me, it is needless to tell you, that Hale, Boyle; and other great names I could mention, were men of as great penetration and judgment, had as good opportunities, and took as much pains to be informed of the truth, as any of the advocates for infidelity can pretend to. And you cannot, with any modesty or consistence, absolutely determine, that they had not as good grounds for thinking themselves right, as you can have for concluding they were wrong.

But, declining the advantage of human authority, I am content the point should rest between you and me. And here I beg you to observe, that I have one evident advantage over you in judging, namely, that I have experienced the good and evil on both sides, and you only on one. If

you were to send me an inventory of your pleasures, how charmingly your time runs on, and how dexterously it is divided between the coffee-houses, play-house, the card-table, and tavern, with intervals of balls, concerts, &c.; I could answer, that most of these I have tried, and tried again, and know the utmost they can yield, and have seen enough of the rest, most heartily to despise them all. Setting religion entirely out of the question, I profess I had rather be a worm to crawl upon the ground, than to bear the name of Man upon the poor terms of whiling away my life in an insipid round of such insignificant and unmanly trifles. I will return your own expression,—I believe you to be a person of sense; but alas! how do you prostitute your talents and capacity; how far do you act below yourself, if you know no higher purpose of life than these childish dissipations, together with the more serious business of rising early and sitting up late, to amass money, that you may be able to enlarge your expenses! I am sure, while I lived in these things, I found them unsatisfying and empty to the last degree; and the only advantage they *afforded* (miserable are they who are forced to deem it an advantage) was, that they often relieved me from the trouble and burden of thinking. If you have any other pleasures than these, they are such as must be evil and inconvenient, even upon your own plan; and, therefore, my friendship will not allow me to bring them into the account. I am willing to hope you do not stoop still lower in pursuit of satisfaction. Thus far we stand upon even ground. You know all that a life of pleasure can give, and I know it likewise.

On the other hand, if I should attempt to explain to you the source and streams of my best pleasures, such as a comfortable assurance of the pardon of my sins, an habitual communion with the God who made heaven and earth, a calm reliance on the divine providence, the cheering prospect of a better life in a better world, with the pleasing foretastes of heaven in my own soul; should I, or could I, tell you the pleasure I often find in reading the Scriptures, in the exercise of prayer, and in that sort of preaching and conversation which you despise; I doubt not but you would think as meanly of my happiness as I do of yours. But here lies the difference, my dear friend, you condemn that which you have never tried. You know no more of these things

than a blind man does of colors; and, notwithstanding all your flourishes, I defy you to be at all times able to satisfy yourself, that things may not possibly be as I have represented them.

Besides, what do I lose upon my plan, that should make me so worthy of your pity? Have you a quicker relish in the prudent use of temporal comforts? Do you think I do not eat my food with as much pleasure as you can do, though, perhaps, with less cost and variety? Is your sleep sounder than mine? Have not I as much satisfaction in social life? It is true, to join much with the gay fluttering tribe, who spend their days in laugh and sing-song, is equally contrary to my duty and inclination. But I have friends and acquaintance as well as you. Among the many who favor me with their esteem and friendship, there are some who are persons of sense, learning, wit, and (what, perhaps, may weigh as much with you) of fortune and distinction. And if you should say, "Ay, but they are all enthusiasts like yourself," you would say nothing to the purpose, since, upon your maxim, that "happiness is according to opinion," it cannot be an objection, but the contrary, to have my acquaintance to my own taste. Thus much for the brighter side of your situation; or, let me add one thing more. I know you have thoughts of marriage; do you think, if you should enter into this relation, your principles are calculated to make you more happy in it than I am? You are well acquainted with our family-life. Do you propose to know more of the peace and heart-felt joy of domestic union than I have known, and continue to know to this hour? I wish you may equal us; and if you do, we shall still be as before, but upon even ground. I need not turn deist, to enjoy the best and the most that this life can afford.

But I need not tell you, that the present life is not made up of pleasurable incidents only. Pain, sickness, losses, disappointments, injuries, and affronts with men, will more or less, at one time or other be our lot. And can you bear these trials better than I? You will not pretend to it. Let me appeal to yourself: How often do you toss and disquiet yourself, like a wild bull in a net, when things cross your expectations? As your thoughts are more engrossed by what you see, you must be more keenly sensible of what

you feel. You cannot view these trials as appointed by a wise and heavenly Father, in subservience to your good: you cannot taste the sweetness of his promises, nor feel the secret supports of his strength, in an hour of affliction; you cannot so cast your burden and care upon him, as to find a sensible relief to your spirit thereby; nor can you see his hand engaged and employed in effecting your deliverance. Of these things you know no more than of the art of flying; but I seriously assure you, and I believe my testimony will go farther with you than my judgment, that they are realities, and that I have found them to be so. When my worldly concerns have been most thorny and discouraging, I have once and again felt the most of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away. However, I may state the case still lower. You do pretty well among your friends; but how do you like being alone? Would you not give something for that happy secret, which could enable you to pass a rainy day pleasantly, without the assistance of business, company, or amusement? Would it not mortify you greatly to travel for a week in an unfrequented road, where you should meet with no lively incidents to recruit and raise your spirits? Alas! what a poor scheme of pleasure is yours, that will not support an interval of reflection!

What you have heard is true: I have a few friends, who meet at my house once a-fortnight, and we spend an hour or two in worshipping the God who made us. And can this move your indignation or your compassion? Does it shew a much nobler spirit, a more refined way of thinking, to live altogether without God in the world? If I kept a card-assembly at those times, it would not displease you. How can you, as a person of sense, avoid being shocked at your own unhappy prejudice? But I remember how it was once with myself, and forbear to wonder. May He who has opened my eyes, open yours. He only can do it. I do not expect to convince you by any thing I can say as of myself; but if He is pleased to make use of me as his instrument, then you will be convinced. How should I then rejoice! I should rejoice to be useful to any one, but especially to you, whom I dearly love. May God shew you your true self, and your true state; then you will attentively listen to what you now disdain to hear of, his

goodness in providing redemption and pardon for the chief of sinners, through him who died upon the cross for sins not his own. Keep this letter by you at my request; and when you write, tell me that you receive it in good part, and that you still believe me to be, &c.

LETTER XXXIX.

A WORD IN SEASON.

DEAR SIR,

IN this dark and declining day, when iniquity abounds, the awful tokens of God's displeasure are multiplying around us, and too many professors, not duly sensible of the real cause of all the evils we either feel, or have reason to fear, are disputing, instead of praying, may the Lord bestow upon you and me, and upon all who fear his name, a spirit suited to the times; that the words of David, "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved," may express the very sensation and frame of our hearts. Permit me to keep this expression in my view while I write, though it may perhaps give my letter something of the air of a sermon.

The Hebrew word answering to "I was grieved," signifies such a kind of grief as is mixed with dislike; such a grief as a believer must feel when he has a sense of his own corruptions. It is frequently rendered, as in Ezek. 20: 43. *to loathe*: "You shall loathe yourselves in your own sight." We are not required strictly to hate ourselves, but the evil that is in us. So, when we look at transgressors, we are not to hate, but to pity them, mourn over them, and pray for them; nor have we any right to boast over them; for by nature, and of ourselves, we are no better than they. But their sinfulness should cause a dislike, an holy indignation; as it is recorded of our Lord, who, though full of compassion and tenderness, so that he wept over his enemies, and prayed for his actual murderers, yet looked upon transgressors with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.

A feeling of this kind seems essential to that new nature which characterises the children of God; and, where it is not in habitual exercise, it is a sufficient evidence that

the soul, if truly alive to God at all, is at least in a lean and distempered state. Who can avoid being grieved and hurt by that which is in direct opposition to what he most loves? Believers love holiness, and unless when stupefied by the arts of Satan, can hardly bear themselves for what they find contrary to it within their own breasts, and must therefore, of course, be grieved with the sins of others. Like righteous Lot, and from his principles, they are "vexed with the conversation of the wicked." Can they who reverence the name of God be easy and unconcerned when they hear it blasphemed? No: their ears are wounded; and their hearts are pained. Can they who are followers of peace and purity, behold unmoved, the riots, licentiousness, and daring wickedness of those who have cast off both shame and fear? Can they who have bowels of mercy and compassion, be unaffected when they see the iron hand of oppression grinding the faces of the poor? Or can any who love the songs of Zion, help being shocked with the songs of drunkards? I trust there are many, who, upon these accounts, are daily crying, "My soul is among lions:" "Wo is me that I dwell in Meshech!" "O gather not my soul with sinners." The thought of being shut up for ever with the ungodly would be terrible as hell to a gracious soul, though there were no devouring fire, no keen sense of the wrath of God to be feared.

They are grieved likewise upon their Lord's account, for they have obtained a spark of zeal for his honor and glory. With Elijah, they are "very jealous for the Lord of hosts." They feel their obligations to him, and know he well deserves to reign in every heart. But when, on the contrary, they see almost every one in a conspiracy against him, despising him to his face, trampling upon his laws, rejecting his authority, and abusing his patience, their eyes affect their hearts. What man of sensibility could brook to see every one about him contriving how to affront and injure the person whom he most loved? Now the Lord is the believer's best friend, the beloved of his soul; and therefore he is grieved and troubled when he "beholds the transgressors."

This emotion is likewise heightened by compassion to souls. Grace gives some view of the evil of sin, the dreadfulness of the wrath of God, and the vast importance

of that word eternity. Thus instructed in the sanctuary of God, they would be stocks and stones, were they capable of beholding sinners rushing upon destruction without being grieved for them. But they cannot bear it: they cannot but give and repeat a faithful warning, though they have little reason to expect any better return than scorn and ill-treatment for what the world accounts an impertinent officiousness.

But who then are believers? Who are thus "on the Lord's side?" If these sentiments are common and radical to all who are born of God, can we make no abatement? Or must we unchristian perhaps the greater part of professors at this time? for it is too evident that many, who bear the name of gospel-professors, discover but little of this concern. In general, I think this subject affords no improper test for the trial of our spirits. The effects of grace, in similar circumstances, are uniform; but if any, who think themselves possessors of it, feel no grief for the abounding of sin and the obstinacy of sinners, they differ from the saints recorded both in the Old and New Testament, and it will be their wisdom to examine and take heed lest they be deceived. It is easy to call Christ, Lord, Lord; but a criminal lukewarmness of spirit, where his cause, honor, and gospel are in question, will one day meet with an awful rebuke, and be treated, in those who make mention of his name, as high treason against his person and government.

But if we allow that, through the contagion of the times and the power of Satan, it is possible for true christians to sink into this indifference, and for the wise, as well as the foolish virgins, to sleep, when they should be watching unto prayer; even these have much to fear, lest they should largely participate in the sufferings which the provocations they connive at have a direct tendency to bring upon a sinful people. When national sins draw down national judgments, the Lord has given us a hope, that he will fix a mark of protection upon them who sigh and mourn in secret before him, for the evils which they are unable to prevent. To these he will be a sanctuary; he will either preserve them unhurt in the midst of surrounding calamities, or he will support them with consolations superior to all their troubles, when the hearts of others are shaken like

leaves in a storm. But none have reason to expect to be thus privileged, who have not a heart given them to lament their own sins and the sins of those among whom they live.

Surely the Lord has a controversy with this land; and there hardly can be a period assigned in the annals of ages, when it was more expedient or seasonable for those who fear him, to stir up each other to humiliation and prayer, than at present. What is commonly called our national debt is swelled to an enormous greatness. It may be quickly expressed in figures; but a person must be something versed in calculation to form a tolerable idea of accumulated millions. But what arithmetic is sufficient to compute the immensity of our national debt in a spiritual sense! or, in other words, the amount of our national sins! The spirit of infidelity, which, for a time, distinguished comparatively a few, and, like a river, was restrained within narrow bounds, has, of late years, broken down its banks and deluged the land. This wide-spreading evil has, in innumerable instances, as might be expected, emboldened the natural heart against the fear of God, hardened it to an insensibility of moral obligation, and strengthened its prejudices against the gospel. The consequence has been, that profligate wickedness is become almost as universal as the air we breathe, and is practised with little more reserve or secrecy than the transactions of common business, except in such instances as would subject the offender to the penalty of human laws. O the unspeakable patience of God! The multiplied instances of impiety, blasphemy, cruelty, adultery, villany, and abominations not to be thought of without horror, under which this land groans, are only known to him who knoweth all things. There are few sins which imply greater contempt of God, or a more obdurate state of mind in the offender, than perjury, yet the guilt of it is so little regarded, and temptations to it so very frequent, that perhaps I do not go too far in supposing there are more deliberate acts of perjury committed amongst us, than among all the rest of mankind taken together. Though some of the Roman poets and historians have given very dark pictures of the times they lived in, their worst descriptions of this kind would hardly be found exaggerated if applied to our own. But what are the sins of hea-

thens, if compared with the like evils perpetrated in a land bearing the name of christian, favored with the word of God, the light of the gospel, and enjoying the blessings of civil and religious liberty and peace in a higher degree, and for a longer continuance, than was afforded to any people of whose history we have heard?

The state of the churches of Christ at this time affords likewise ample cause for humiliation and grief. The formality, conformity to the world, the want of love, the intemperate, and unprofitable contentions, which prevail among us, shew how faintly the power of the gospel is felt, even by many who profess to have embraced it. The true and undefiled doctrine of Jesus is not only opposed by its declared enemies, but wounded and dishonored in the house of its friends. And though the sins of those who avow subjection to the institutions of Christ, may not have so gross a stamp of profligacy and immorality, as of those who set him openly at defiance; yet they have, in some respects, an aggravation, of which the others are not capable; as being committed against clearer light, and peculiar acknowledged obligations. From the consideration of both taken together, who, that has a spark of seriousness and attention, and that has learned from scripture and history the sure connexion between sin and trouble, can forbear trembling at that alarming question, so often proposed to the consciences of ungrateful Israel of old, "Shall not I visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" especially when we see the dispensations of God's providence so awfully corresponding with the threatenings in his word.

How much is it to be desired, then, that all who truly fear the Lord, instead of wasting their time in useless squabbles, may unite in earnest prayer; and, with deep compunction of heart, bemoan those evils, which, unless repented of and forsaken, may bring upon us, as a people, such distress as neither we, nor our fathers have known! If he is pleased thus to give us a heart to seek him, he will yet be found of us; but if, when his hand is lifted up, we cannot, or will not see, nor regard the signs of the times, there is great reason to fear, that our case is deplorable indeed.

A few, however, there will be, who will lay these things suitably to heart; and whom the Lord will favor and spare, as a man spareth his only son that serveth him. That you and I may be of this happy number, is the sincere prayer of, &c.

LETTER XL.

A WORD TO PROFESSORS IN TRADE.

DEAR SIR,

It is suspected, or rather it is too certainly known, that, among those who are deemed gospel-professors, there are some persons who allow themselves in the practice of dealing in prohibited, uncustomed, or, as the common phrase is, smuggled goods, to the prejudice of the public revenue, and the detriment of the fair trader.

The decisions of the word of God upon this point are so plain and determinate, that it is rather difficult to *conceive* how a sincere mind can either overlook or mistake them. The same authority which forbids us to commit adultery, or murder, requires us to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;" to render unto all their dues: tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom. These precepts enjoin no more than what the common sense of mankind pronounces to be due from subjects and members of society to the governments they live under, and by which they are protected. But the obligation is greatly enforced upon those who acknowledge themselves the disciples of Christ, since he has been pleased to make their compliance herein a part of the obedience they owe to himself. And it is plain that these injunctions are universal and binding, under all civil governments, as such; for none can justly suppose that tributes exacted by the Roman emperors, (under whose dominion the first Christians lived,) such as Tiberius or Nero, had the sanction of our Lord and his apostles on account of their peculiar equity.

The vending smuggled goods, or the buying them, if known to be so, is likewise injurious to the fair trader, who, conscientiously paying the prescribed duties, cannot

afford to sell so cheap as the smuggler; and, therefore, must expect the fewer customers. In this view, it offends the royal law, of "doing to others as we would they should do unto us." The force of this argument may be easily felt by any one who will make the case his own. Without any nice reasoning, people may know in a moment that they should not like to be put to this disadvantage. It is, therefore, unjust, (*i. e.* sinful, and utterly unbecoming a professor of religion,) to purchase smuggled goods, even in small quantities, and for family-use. As for those who, being in trade themselves, make this practice a branch of their business, and, under the semblance of a fair reputation, are doing things in secret, which they would tremble to have discovered, being afraid of the exchequer, though not of God, I can only pray that God may give them repentance; for it is a work of darkness, and needs it. Transactions of this kind cannot be carried on for a course of time without such a series and complication of fraud and meanness*, and, for the most part, of perjury likewise, as would be scandalous, not only in a professed Christian, but in an avowed infidel.

It should be observed likewise, that there is hardly any set of men more lost to society, or in a situation more dangerous to themselves and others, than the people who are called smugglers. Frequent fightings, and sometimes murder itself, are the consequence of their illicit commerce. Their money is ill gotten, and it is generally ill spent. They are greatly to be pitied. The employment they are accustomed to has a direct tendency to deprive them of character, and the privileges of social life, and to harden their hearts, and stupify their consciences, in the ways of sin. But for whom are they risking their lives, and ruining their souls? I would hope, reader, not for you, if you account yourself a Christian. If you, for the sake of gain, encourage and assist them, by buying or selling their goods, you are so far responsible for the consequences. You encourage them in sin; you expose them to mischief. And have you so learned Christ? Is this the testimony you give of the uprightness of your hearts and ways? Is it thus

* Dr. Johnson, defining a smuggler, says, he is "a wretch who imports or exports goods without payment of the customs."

you show your compassion for the souls of men? Ah! shake your hands from gain so dearly earned. Think not to support the cause of God with such gain; he hates robbery for burnt-offering. Think it not lawful, or safe, to put a farthing of it into your treasury, lest it secretly communicate a moth and a curse to all that you possess; for it is the price of blood, the blood of souls. If you are indeed a child of God, and will persist in this path after admonition received, he assured your sin will find you out. If the Lord loves you, he will not suffer you to prosper in your perverseness. You may rather expect, that as a little damaged corn is sufficient to spoil the whole heap to which it is laid, so money, thus obtained, will deprive you of the blessing and comfort you might otherwise expect from your lawful acquisitions.

If you are determined to persist, in opposition to Scripture, to law, to equity, and humanity, you have, doubtless, as I suppose you a professor, some plea or excuse with which you attempt to justify yourself, and to keep your conscience quiet. See to it, that it be such a one as will bear the examination of a dying hour. You will not surely plead that "things are come to such a pass, there is no carrying on business upon other terms to advantage!" Will the practice of the world, who know not Christ, be a proper precedent for you, who call yourself by his name? That cannot be, since his command is, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." That the truth and power of his grace may be manifested, he is pleased to put his servants into such situations, that they must forego some seeming advantages, and suffer some seeming hardships, in their worldly connexions, if they will approve themselves faithful to him, and live in the exercise of a good conscience. He promises that his grace shall be sufficient for them. It is the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich; and, for want of this, we see many rise early, take late rest, and eat the bread of carefulness, to no purpose. And I believe integrity and diligence in business, with an humble dependence upon his providence, are the best methods of thriving, even in temporals. However, they who lose for him are in no danger of losing by him. They may be confident of so much as he sees best for them; and they shall have his peace and blessing with it. But if, when you are placed in

a state of trial, the love of the world is so powerful in your heart that you cannot resist the temptation of enriching yourself by unlawful means, you have great reason to fear you have not his Spirit, and are therefore none of his,
I am, &c.

LETTER XLI.

ON THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS.

DEAR SIR,

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

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

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

ively, to separate believers from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

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

There are likewise an innumerable company of elect, or good angels, Rev. 3:11. who were preserved by sovereign grace, and are now established (together with believers) in Christ Jesus, the great head of the whole family of God, in heaven and in earth. From these, we may be sure, believers have nothing to fear. They are our brethren and fellow-servants. They join in the song of the redeemed before the throne, and rejoice in the conversion of a sinner upon earth. We cannot include these in the apostle's challenge, any farther than by way of supposition, as he expresses himself upon another occasion, Gal. 1:8. It is not possible that an angel from heaven should preach, if he came to preach, any other gospel than that which is revealed in Scripture; but if such a thing could be supposed, we ought not to regard him. So it is not to be thought that the elect angels of God should wish to hinder the salvation of a sinner. But if you conceive for a moment that any, or all of them, could form such a design, they would not be able to succeed; for they are all subject to him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. So far, however, are the holy angels from designing us harm, that they are greatly instrumental in promoting our good. They are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation;" and they rejoice in the service, and account it their honor to be thus employed.

I propose, in this paper, briefly to consider the ministry of good angels; and may, perhaps, hereafter offer a few thoughts on the influence and interference of evil angels;

who are continually laboring to disturb and trouble those whom they are not permitted to destroy. And I shall not attempt to amuse the reader with new and strange conjectures upon these subjects, or to intrude into those things which are not revealed, but shall confine myself to the express declarations of the word of God.

The great God works all in all, in both worlds. It is he who filleth the earth with good things, causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and provides corn for the food of man. But in thus spreading a table for us he makes use of instruments. He commands his sun to shine, and his rain to descend. So he is the life, strength, and comfort of the renewed soul. All the streams of grace flow from Christ, the fountain. But, from the analogy observable in his works, we might reasonably suppose, that, on many occasions, he is pleased to use means and instruments, and particularly the ministry of his angels, to communicate good to his children. Scripture expressly confirms this inference, and leaves it no longer a point of mere conjecture. He gives his angels charge over them, and they encamp round about them that fear him. In this way honor is given to Jesus, as the Lord both of angels and men; and a sweet intercourse is kept up between the different parts of the household of God. That angels have been thus employed in fact, is plain from the history both of the Old and New Testament. They have often made themselves visible when sent to declare the will of God, as to Jacob, Elijah, and David. Gabriel appeared to Zacharias and Mary; and a multitude joined in ascribing "glory to God in the highest" when they brought to the shepherds the joyful news of a Saviour's birth. An angel delivered Peter from prison, and comforted Paul when tossed by a tempest upon the sea. How far the visible ministration of angels is continued in these days is not easy to determine. Many persons have been imposed upon by Satan through such expectations; and it is not safe to look for extraordinary things; yet I do not know that we have warrant from Scripture to limit the Lord, so far as to affirm, that he doth not, nor ever will, upon any occasion, permit his angels to be seen by men, as in former times. The apostle, pressing believers to exercise hospitality, uses this argument, that "thereby some have entertained angels unawares;" which

would hardly seem to be a pertinent motive, if it were absolutely certain that angels would never offer themselves as visitants to the servants of God in future times as they had formerly done. But, waving speculations as to their visible appearance, it is sufficient to know that they are really, though invisibly, near us, and mindful of us.

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

We may warrantably think they are employed in restraining, over-ruling, and controlling the designs of Satan and his angels. The power, malice, and subtlety of our enemy are very great. We may learn what he would do to us all, if he could, from the instance of Job. But the Lord rebukes him, and that most probably by the ministry of unfallen angels, who are said to encamp round his people, to deliver them; and doubtless their care is especially employed where the greatest danger lies. Much to this purpose seems to be implied in the following passages, Dan. 10:13. Rev. 12:7. Jude 9.

They are witnesses to the sufferings and to the worship of his people, 1 Cor. 4:9. Though they do not show themselves to us, as heretofore to Peter or Paul, they are still near and attentive, are interested in the conflicts, and rejoice in the victories of a poor believer. They are present

likewise in our solemn assemblies; therefore the apostle charges Timothy, as "before the elect angels," and seems to refer to them in 1 Cor. 11:10. This reflection should enliven and regulate our thoughts when we come together; for though the presence of our Lord and Saviour is the great consideration, yet this likewise may, in its proper place, have some influence to compose our behavior, Heb. 12:22.

The ministry of angels preserves us from innumerable dangers and alarms which await us in our daily path. This is expressly taught in Psalm 91. When we receive little or no harm from a fall, or when a sudden motion of our minds leads us to avoid a danger which we were not aware of, perhaps the angels of God have been the means of our preservation: nay, it may be owing to their good offices that we ever perform a journey in safety, or are preserved from the evils we are liable to when sleeping upon our beds, and incapable of taking any care of ourselves.

Finally, they are appointed to attend the saints in their last hours, and, in a manner beyond our present apprehension, to keep off the powers of darkness, and bear the children of God safely home to their Father's house, Luke 16:22.

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

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

Again, 2. Many of the Lord's people are tempted to

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

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

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

I am, &c.

March 5, 1777.

LETTERS

TO

THE REVEREND MR. B——.

LETTER I.

January 27, 1778.

DEAR AND REVEREND SIR,

I CALL you *Dear* because I love you, and I shall continue to style you *Reverend* as long as you dignify me with that title. It is, indeed, a pretty sounding epithet, and forms a striking contrast in the usual application. The inhabitants of the moon (if there be any) have perhaps no idea how many Reverend, Right Reverend, and Most Reverend, sinners we have in Europe. And yet you are *reverend*, and I revere you, because I believe the Lord liveth in you, and has chosen you to be a temple of his presence, and an instrument of his grace.

I hope the two sermons you preached in London were made useful to others, and the medicines you took there were useful to yourself. I am glad to hear you are safe at home, and something better. Cheerful spring is approaching: then I hope the barometer of your spirits will rise. But the presence of the Lord can bring a pleasanter spring than April, and even in the depth of winter.

At present it is January with me, both within and without. The outward sun shines and looks pleasant, but his beams are faint, and too feeble to dissolve the frost. So is it in my heart; I have many bright and pleasant beams of truth in my view, but cold predominates in my frost-bound spirit, and they have but little power to warm me. I could tell a stranger something about Jesus that would perhaps

astonish him: such a glorious person! such wonderful love! such humiliation! such a death! and then what he is now himself, and what he is to his people! What a sun! what a shield! what a root! what a life! what a friend! My tongue can run on upon these subjects sometimes; and could my heart keep pace with it I should be the happiest fellow in the country. Stupid creature! to know these things so well, and yet be no more affected with them! Indeed, I have reason to be upon ill terms with myself! It is strange that pride should ever find any thing in my experience to feed upon; but this completes my character for folly, vileness, and inconsistency, that I am not only poor, but proud; and though I am convinced I am a very wretch, a nothing before the Lord, I am prone to go forth among my fellow-creatures as though I were wise and good.

You wonder what I am doing; and well you may: I am sure you would if you lived with me. Too much of my time passes in busy idleness, too much in waking dreams. I aim at something; but hindrances from within and without make it difficult for me to accomplish any thing. I dare not say I am absolutely idle, or that I wilfully waste much of my time. I have seldom one hour free from interruption. Letters come that must be answered, visitants that must be received, business that must be attended to. I have a good many sheep and lambs to look after, sick and afflicted souls, dear to the Lord; and therefore, whatever stands still, these must not be neglected. Amongst these various avocations, night comes before I am ready for noon; and the week closes, when, according to the state of my business, it should not be more than Tuesday. O precious, irrecoverable time! O that I had more wisdom in redeeming and improving thee! Pray for me, that the Lord may teach me to serve him better.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

April 28, 1778.

DEAR SIR,

I WAS not much disappointed at not meeting you at home; I know how difficult it is to get away from ———, if you are seen in the street after breakfast. The horse-leech has two daughters, saying, Give, give: the cry there is, Preach, preach. When you have told them all, you must tell them more, or tell it them over again. Whoever will find tongue, they will engage to find ears. Yet I do not blame this importunity, I wish you were teased more with it in your own town; for though, undoubtedly, there are too many, both at N—— and here, whose religion lies too much in hearing, yet in many it proceeds from a love to the truth, and to the ministers who dispense it. And I generally observe, that they who are not willing to hear a stranger, (if his character is known,) are indifferent enough about hearing their own minister.

I beg you to pray for me. I am a poor creature, full of wants. I seem to need the wisdom of Solomon, the meekness of Moses, and the zeal of Paul, to enable me to make full proof of my ministry. But, alas! you may guess the rest.

Send me "The way to Christ." I am willing to be a debtor to the wise and unwise, to doctors and shoemakers, if I can get a hint, or a *Nota Bene*, from any one, without respect to parties. When a house is on fire, Churchmen, Dissenters, Methodists, Papists, Moravians, and Mystics, are all welcome to bring water. At such times, nobody asks, Pray, friend, whom do you hear? or, What do you think of the five points? &c., &c.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

July 7, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I KNOW not that I have any thing to say worth postage, though perhaps, had I seen you before you set off, something might have occurred which will not be found in my letter. Yet I write a line, because you bid me, and are now in a far, foreign country. You will find Mr. —— a man to your tooth, but he is in Mr. W——'s connexion. So I remember venerable Bede, after giving a high character of some contemporary, kicks his full pail of milk down, and reduces him almost to nothing, by adding, in the close, to this purpose: "but, unhappy man, he did not keep Easter our way." A fig for all connexions, say I, and say you, but that which is formed by the bands, joints, and ligaments, the apostle speaks of, Eph. 4:16. *et alibi*. Therefore, I venture to repeat it, that Mr. ——, though he often sees and hears Mr. W——, and I believe loves him well, is a good man; and you will see the invisible mark upon his forehead, if you examine him with your spiritual spectacles.

Now, methinks I do pity you: I see you melted with heat, stifled with smoke, and stunned with noise. Ah! what a change from the brooks, and bushes, and birds, and green fields, to which you had lately access! Of old they used to retire into the deserts for mortification. If I was to set myself a moderate penance, it might be to spend a fortnight in London in the height of summer. But I forget myself:—I hope the Lord is with you, and then all places are alike. He makes the dungeon and the stocks comfortable, (Acts 16.) yea, a fiery furnace, or a lion's den. A child of God in London seems to be in all these trying situations: but Jesus can preserve his own. I honor the grace of God in those few (comparatively few, I fear,) who preserve their garments undefiled in that Sardis. The air is filled with infection, and it is by special power and miraculous preservation they enjoy spiritual health, when so many sicken, and fall around them on the right hand and on the left. May the Lord preserve you from the various

epidemical soul-diseases which abound where you are, and be your comfort and defence from day to day.

Last week we had a lion in town. I went to see him. He was wonderfully tame; as familiar with his keeper, as docile and obedient, as a spaniel. Yet the man told me he had his surly fits, when they durst not touch him. No looking-glass could express my face more justly than this lion did my heart. I could trace every feature: as wild and fierce by nature, yea, much more so; but grace has in some measure tamed me. I know and love my Keeper, and sometimes watch his looks that I may learn his will. But, oh! I have my surly fits too; seasons when I relapse into the savage again, as though I had forgotten all.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

July 13, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As we are so soon to meet, and as I have nothing very important to communicate, and many things occur which might demand my time, I have no plea to offer, either to you or myself, for writing again, but because I love you.

I pity the unknown considerable minister with whom you smoked your morning-pipe. But we must take men and things as we find them: and when we fall in company with those from whom we can get little other good, it is likely we shall at least find occasion for the exercise of patience and charity towards them, and of thankfulness to Him who hath made us to differ. And these are good things, though, perhaps, the occasion may not be pleasant. Indeed, a Christian, if in a right spirit, is always in his Lord's school, and may learn either a new lesson, or how to practise an old one, by every thing he sees or hears, provided he does not wilfully tread upon forbidden ground. If he were constrained to spend a day with the poor creatures in the common side of Newgate, though he could not talk with them of what God has done for his soul, he might be more sensible of his mercy by the contrast he would observe around him. He might rejoice for himself, and mourn

over them, and thus perhaps get as much benefit as from the best sermon he ever heard.

It is necessary, all things taken together, to have connexion more or less with narrow-minded people. If they are, notwithstanding their prejudices, civil to us, they have a right to some civility from us. We may love them, though we cannot admire them, and pick something good from them, notwithstanding we see much to blame. It is, perhaps, the highest triumph we can obtain over bigotry, when we are able to bear with bigots themselves. For they are a set of troublesome folks, whom Mr. Self is often very forward to exclude from the comprehensive candor and tenderness which he professes to exercise towards those who differ from him.

I am glad your present home (a believer should be always at home) is pleasant; the rooms large and airy; your host and hostess kind and spiritual; and, upon the whole, all things as well as you could expect to find them, considering where you are. I could give you much such an account of my usual head-quarters in the city; but still London is London. I do not wish you to live there, for my own sake as well as yours; but if the Lord should so appoint, I believe he can make you easy there, and enable me to make a tolerable shift without you. Yet I certainly should miss you; for I have no person in this neighborhood with whom my heart so thoroughly unites in spirituals, though there are many whom I love. But conversation with most Christians is something like going to court; where, except you are dressed exactly according to a prescribed standard, you will either not be admitted, or you must expect to be heartily stared at. But you and I can meet and converse, *sans contrainte*, in an undress, without fear of offending, or being accounted offenders for a word out of place, and not exactly in the pink of the mode.

I know not how it is: I think my sentiments and experience are as orthodox and Calvinistical as need be; and yet I am a sort of speckled bird among my Calvinist brethren. I am a mighty good Churchman, but pass amongst such as a Dissenter in prunello. On the other hand, the Dissenters (many of them I mean) think me defective, either in understanding or in conscience, for staying where I am. Well, there is a middle party, called Methodists, but nei-

ther do my dimensions exactly fit with them. I am somehow disqualified for claiming a full brotherhood with any party. But there are a few among all parties who bear with me and love me, and with this I must be content at present. But so far as they love the Lord Jesus, I desire, and by his grace I determine, (with or without their leave,) to love them all. Party-walls, though stronger than the walls of Babylon, must come down in the general ruin, when the earth and all its works shall be burnt up, if not sooner.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

July —, 1778.

MY DEAR SIR,

I WAS glad to hear that you were again within a few miles of me; and I would praise the Lord, who led you out, and brought you home in safety, and preserved all in peace while you were abroad, so that you found nothing very painful to embitter your return. Many go abroad well, but return no more. The affectionate wife, the prattling children, listen for the well-known sound of papa's foot at the door; but they listen in vain: a fall or a fever has intercepted him, and he is gone far, far away. Some leave all well when they go from home; but how changed, how trying the scene when they come back! In their absence the Lord has taken away the desire of their eyes with a stroke, or perhaps ruffians have plundered and murdered their family in the dead of the night, or the fire devoured their habitation.

Ah! how large and various is the list of evils and calamities with which sin has filled the world! You and I and ours escape them; we stand, though in a field of battle, where thousands fall around us, because the Lord is pleased to keep us. May he have the praise, and may we only live to love and serve him.

Mrs. — has been very ill, and my heart often much pained while you have been absent. But the Lord has removed his hand; she is much better, and I hope she will

be seen in his house to-morrow. I have few trials in my own person; but when the Lord afflicts her, I feel it. It is a mercy that he has made us one; but it exposes us to many a pain, which we might have missed if we cared but little for each other. Alas! there is usually an ounce of the golden calf, of idolatry and dependence, in all the warm regard we bear to creatures. *Hinc illæ lachrymæ!* For this reason, our sharpest trials usually spring from our most valued comforts.

I cannot come to you: therefore you must come hither speedily. Be sure to bring Mr. B—— with you. I shall be very glad to see him, and I long to thank him for clothing my book. It looks well on the outside, and I hope to find it sound and savory. I love the author, and that is a step towards liking the book. For where we love, we are generally tender, and favorably take every thing by the best handle, and are vastly full of candor: but if we are prejudiced against the man, the poor book is half condemned before we open it. It had need be written well, for it will be read with a suspicious eye, as if we wished to find treason in every page. I am glad I diverted and profited you by calling myself a speckled bird. I can tell you, such a bird in this day, that wears the full color of no sect or party, is *rara avis*; if not quite so scarce as the phoenix, yet to be met with but here and there. It is impossible I should be all of a color, when I have been a debtor to all sorts; and, like the jay in the fable, have been beholden to most of the birds in the air for a feather or two. Church and Meeting, Methodist and Moravian, may all perceive something in my coat taken from them. None of them are angry with me for borrowing from them; but then, why could not I be content with their color, without going among other flocks and coveys, to make myself such a motley figure? Let them be angry; if I have culled the best feathers from all, then surely I am finer than any.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

August —, 1778.

DEAR SIR,

IF the Lord affords health, if the weather be tolerable, if no unforeseen change takes place, if no company comes in upon me to-night, (which sometimes unexpectedly happens,) —with these provisos, Mr. S—— and I have engaged to travel to —— on Monday next, and hope to be with you by or before eleven o'clock.

In such a precarious world, it is needful to form our plans at two days distance with precaution and exceptions, James 4:13. However, if it be the Lord's will to bring us together, and if the purposed interview be for his glory and our good, then I am sure nothing shall prevent it. And who in his right wits would wish either to visit or be visited upon any other terms? O! if we could but be pleased with his will, we might be pleased from morning to night, and every day in the year.

Pray for a blessing upon our coming together. It would be a pity to walk ten miles to pick straws, or to come with our empty vessels upon our heads, saying, we have found no water.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

October —, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOUR letters are always welcome; the last doubly so, for being unexpected. If you never heard before of a line of yours being useful, I will tell you for once, that I get some pleasure and instruction whenever you write to me. And I see not but your call to letter-writing is as clear as mine, at least when you are able to put pen to paper.

I must say something to your queries about 2 Sam. 14. I do not approve of the scholastic distinctions about inspiration, which seem to have a tendency to explain away the authority and certainty of one half of the Bible at least.

Though the penmen of the Scriptures were ever so well informed of some facts, they would, as you observe, need express, full, and infallible inspiration, to teach them what the Lord would have selected and recorded for the use of the church, amongst many others, which to themselves might appear equally important.

However, with respect to historical passages, I dare not pronounce positively that any of them are, even in the literal sense, unworthy of the wisdom of the Holy Ghost, and the dignity of inspiration. Some, yea, many of them, have often appeared trivial to me; but I check the thought, and charge it to my own ignorance and temerity. It must have some importance, because I read it in God's book. On the other hand, though I will not deny that they all may have a spiritual and mystical sense, (for I am no more qualified to judge of the deep things of the Spirit, than to tell you what is passing this morning at the bottom of the sea;) yet if, with my present modicum of light, I should undertake to expound many passages in a mystical sense, I fear such a judge as you would think my interpretations fanciful, and not well supported. I suppose I should have thought the Bible complete, though it had not informed me of the death of Rebekah's nurse, or where she was buried. But some tell me that Deborah is the law, and that by the oak I am to understand the cross of Christ: and I remember to have heard of a preacher who discovered a type of Christ crucified in Absalom hanging by the hair on another oak. I am quite a mole when compared with these eagle-eyed divines, and must often content myself with plodding upon the lower ground of accommodation and allusion, except when the New Testament writers assure me what the mind of the Holy Ghost was. I can find the gospel with more confidence in the history of Sarah and Hagar, than in that of Leah and Rachel; though, without Paul's help, I should have considered them both as family-squabbles, recorded chiefly to illustrate the general truth, that vanity and vexation of spirit are incident to the best men, in the most favored situations. And I think there is no part of Old Testament history from which I could not (the Lord helping me) draw observations that might be suitable to the pulpit, and profitable to his people: so I might, perhaps, from Livy or Tacitus. But then, with the Bible in my hands, I go

upon sure grounds: I am certain of the facts I speak from, that they really did happen. I may likewise depend upon the springs and motives of action, and not amuse myself and hearers with speeches which were never spoken, and motives which were never thought of, till the historian rummaged his pericranium for something to embellish his work. I doubt not but, were you to consider Joab's courtly conduct only in a literal sense, how it tallied with David's desire, and how gravely and graciously he granted himself a favor while he professed to oblige Joab: I say, in this view you would be able to illustrate many important scriptural doctrines, and to shew that the passage is important to those who are engaged in studying the anatomy of the human heart.

I am, &c.

LETTER VIII.

October 27, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE been witness to a great and important revolution this morning, which took place while the greatest part of the world was asleep. Like many state revolutions, its first beginnings were almost undiscernable; but the progress, though gradual, was steady, and the event decisive. A while ago darkness reigned. Had a man then dropped, for the first time, into our world, he might have thought himself banished into a hopeless dungeon. How could he expect light to rise out of such a state? And when he saw the first glimmering of dawn in the east, how could he promise himself that it was the forerunner of such a glorious sun as has since arisen? With what wonder would such a new comer observe the bounds of his view enlarging, and the distinctness of objects increasing from one minute to another; and how well content would he be to part with the twinklings of the stars, when he had the broad day all around him in exchange! I cannot say this revolution is extraordinary, because it happens every morning; but surely it is astonishing, or rather it would be so, if man was not astonishingly stupid.

Such strangers once were we. Darkness, gross darkness, covered us. How confined were our views! And even the things which were within our reach we could not distinguish. Little did we then think what a glorious day we were appointed to see; what an unbounded prospect would ere long open before us. We knew not that there was a Sun of righteousness, and that he would dawn, and rise, and shine upon our hearts. And as the idea of what we see now was then hidden from us, so at present we are almost equally at a loss how to form any conception of the stronger light and brighter prospects which we wait and hope for. Comparatively we are in the dark still: at the most, we have but a dim twilight, and see nothing clearly; but it is the dawn of immortality, and a sure presage and earnest of glory.

Thus, at times, it seems, a darkness that may be felt broods over your natural spirits: but when the day-star rises upon your heart, you see and rejoice in his light. You have days as well as nights; and after a few more vicissitudes, you will take your flight to the regions of everlasting light, where your sun will go down no more. Happy you, and happy I, if I shall meet you there, as I trust I shall. How shall we love, and sing, and wonder, and praise the Saviour's name.

Last Sunday a young man died here of extreme old age, at twenty-five. He labored hard to ruin a good constitution, and unhappily succeeded; yet amused himself with the hopes of recovery almost to the last. We have a sad knot of such poor creatures in this place, who labor to stifle each other's convictions, and to ruin themselves and associates, soul and body. How industriously is Satan served! I was formerly one of his most active under-tempters. Not content with running the broad way myself, I was indefatigable in enticing others; and had my influence been equal to my wishes, I would have carried all the human race with me. And, doubtless, some have perished, to whose destruction I was greatly instrumental, by tempting them to sin, and by poisoning and hardening them with principles of infidelity; and yet I was spared. When I think of the most with whom I spent my unhappy days of ignorance, I am ready to say, I only am escaped alive to tell thee. Surely I have not half the activity and zeal in the service

of him who snatched me as a brand out of the burning, as I had in the service of his enemy. Then the whole stream of my endeavors and affections went one way; now my best desires are continually crossed, counteracted, and spoiled, by the sin which dwelleth in me; then the tide of corrupt nature bore me along, now I have to strive and swim against it. The Lord cut me short of opportunities, and placed me where I could do but little mischief; but had my abilities and occasions been equal to my heart, I should have been a Voltaire and a Tiberius in one character, a monster of profaneness and licentiousness. “O to grace how great a debtor!” A common drunkard or profligate is a petty sinner to what I was. I had the ambition of a Cæsar or an Alexander, and wanted to rank in wickedness among the foremost of the human race. When you have read this, praise the Lord for his mercy to the chief of sinners, and pray that I may have grace to be faithful.—But I have rambled. I meant to tell you, that on Sunday afternoon I preached from Ezek. 33: 10, 11. “Why will ye die?” &c. I endeavored to shew poor sinners, that if they died, it was because they would, and if they would they must. I was much affected for a time: I could hardly speak for weeping, and some wept with me. From some, alas! I can no more draw a tear, or a relenting thought, than from a mill-stone.

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

November 27, 1778.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You are a better expositor of Scripture than of my speeches, if you really inferred from my last that I think you shall die soon. I cannot say positively you will not die soon, because life at all times is uncertain; however, according to the doctrine of probabilities, I think, and always thought, you bid fair enough to outlive me. The gloomy tinge of your weak spirits led you to consider yourself much worse in point of health than you appear to me to be.

In the other point I dare be more positive, that die when you will, you will die in the Lord. Of this I have not the least doubt; and I believe you doubt of it less, if possible, than I, except in those darker moments when the atrabilious humor prevails.

I heartily sympathize with you in your complaints; but I see you in safe hands. The Lord loves you, and will take care of you. He who raises the dead, can revive your spirits when you are cast down. He who sets bounds to the sea, and says, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further," can limit and moderate that gloom which sometimes distresses you. He knows why he permits you to be thus exercised. I cannot assign the reasons, but I am sure they are worthy of his wisdom and love, and that you will hereafter see, and say, He has done all things well. If I was as wise as your philosopher, I might say a great deal about a melancholy complexion; but I love not to puzzle myself with second causes, while the first cause is at hand, which sufficiently accounts for every phenomenon in a believer's experience. Your constitution, your situation, your temper, your distemper, all that is either comfortable or painful in your lot, is of his appointment. The hairs of your head are all numbered: the same power which produced the planet Jupiter, is necessary to the production of a single hair, nor can one of them fall to the ground without his notice, any more than the stars can fall from their orbits. In providence, no less than in creation, he is *Maximus in minimis*. Therefore fear not; only believe. Our sea may sometimes be stormy, but we have an infallible pilot, and shall infallibly gain our port.

I am, &c.

LETTER X.

February 23, 1770.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

ON Saturday, and not before, I heard you had been ill. Had the news reached me sooner, I should have sent you a line sooner. I hope you will be able to inform me that

you are now better, and that the Lord continues to do you good by every dispensation he allots you. Healing and wounding are equally from his hand, and equally tokens of his love and care over us. I have but little affliction in my own person, but I have been often chastened of late by proxy. The Lord, for his people's sake, is still pleased to give me health and strength for public service, but when I need the rod he lays it upon Mrs. ———. In this way I have felt much, without being disabled or laid aside. But he has heard prayer for her likewise, and for more than a fortnight past she has been comfortably well. I lay at least one half of her sicknesses to my own account: she suffers for me, and I through her. It is indeed touching me in a tender part. Perhaps if I could be more wise, watchful, and humble, it might contribute more to the re-establishment of her health than all the medicines she takes.

I somehow neglected to confer with you about the business of the Fast-day. The last of my three sermons, when I had, as I expected, the largest congregation, was a sort of historical discourse, from Deut. 32: 15, in which, running over the leading national events from the time of Wickliff, I endeavored to trace the steps and turns by which the Lord has made us a fat and thriving people, and in the event blessed us beyond his favorite Jeshurun of old, with civil and religious liberty, peace, honor, and prosperity, and gospel-privileges: How fat we were when the war terminated in the year 1763, and how we have kicked, and forsaken the Rock of salvation of late years. Then followed a sketch of our present state and spirit as a people, both in a religious and political view. I started at the picture while I drew it, though it was a very inadequate representation. We seemed willing to afflict our souls, for one day, as Dr. Lowth reads Isa. 58: 5. But the next day, things returned into their former channel; the fast and the occasion seemed presently forgotten, except by a few simple souls, who are despised and hated by the rest for their preciseness, because they think sin ought to be lamented every day in the year.

Who would envy Cassandra her gift of prophecy upon the terms she had it, that her declarations, however true, should meet with no belief or regard? It is the lot of gospel-ministers, with respect to the bulk of their hearers.

But blessed be the grace which makes a few exceptions. Here and there one will hear, believe, and be saved. Every one of these is worth a world, and our success with a few should console us for all our trials.

Come and see us as soon as you can, only not to-morrow, for I am then to go to T——. My Lord, the great Shepherd has one sheep there, related to the fold under my care. I can seldom see her, and she is very ill. I expect she will soon be removed to the pasture above. Our love to Mrs. B——.

Believe me yours, &c.

LETTER XI.

April 23, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

MAY I not style myself a friend, when I remember you after an interval of several weeks since I saw you, and through a distance of threescore miles? But the truth is, you have been neither absent nor distant from my heart a day. Your idea has travelled with me: you are a kind of familiar, very often before the eye of my mind. This, I hope, may be admitted as a proof of friendship.

I know the Lord loves you, and you know it likewise: every affliction affords you a fresh proof of it. How wise his management in our trials! How wisely adjusted in season, weight, and continuance, to answer his gracious purposes in sending them! How unspeakably better to be at his disposal than at our own? So you say, so you think, so you find. You trust in him, and shall not be disappointed. Help me with your prayers, that I may trust him too, and be at length enabled to say without reserve, *What thou wilt, when thou wilt, how thou wilt.* I had rather speak these three sentences from my heart, in my mother-tongue, than be master of all the languages in Europe.

I am yours, &c.

LETTER XII.

August 19, 1779.

MY DAER FRIEND,

AMONG the rest of temporal mercies, I would be thankful for pen, ink, and paper, and the convenience of the post, by which means we can waft a thought to a friend when we cannot get at him. My will has been good to see you, but you must accept the will for the deed. The Lord has not permitted me.

I have been troubled of late with the rheumatism in my left arm. Mine is a sinful, vile body, and it is a mercy that any part of it is free from pain. It is virtually the seat and subject of all diseases; but the Lord holds them like wild beasts in a chain, under a strong restraint: were that restraint taken off, they would rush upon their prey from every quarter, and seize upon every limb, member, joint, and nerve, at once. Yet, though I am a sinner, and though my whole texture is so frail and exposed, I have enjoyed for a number of years an almost perfect exemption both from pain and sickness. This is wonderful indeed, even in my own eyes.

But my soul is far from being in a healthy state. There I have labored, and still labor, under a complication of diseases; and, but for the care and skill of an infallible Physician, I must have died the death long ago. At this very moment my soul is feverish, dropsical, paralytic. I feel a loss of appetite, a disinclination both to food and to medicine; so that I am alive by miracle: yet I trust I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. When I faint, he revives me again. I am sure he is able, and I trust he has promised to heal me; but how inveterate must my disease be, that is not yet subdued, even under his management!

Well, my friend, there is a land where the inhabitants shall no more say, I am sick. Then my eyes will not be dim, nor my ear heavy, nor my heart hard.

One sight of Jesus as he is
Will strike all sin for ever dead.

Blessed be his name for this glorious hope! May it cheer us under all our present uneasy feelings, and reconcile us to every cross. The way must be right, however rough, that leads to such a glorious end.

O for more of that gracious influence, which in a moment can make the wilderness-soul rejoice and blossom like the rose! I want something which neither critics nor commentators can help me to. The Scripture itself, whether I read it in Hebrew, Greek, French, or English, is a sealed book in all these languages, unless the Spirit of the Lord is present to expound and apply. Pray for me. No prayer seems more suitable to me than that of the psalmist: "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name."

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

August 28, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I WANT to hear how you are. I hope your complaint is not worse than when I saw you. I hope you are easier, and will soon find yourself able to move about again. I should be sorry, if to the symptom of the stone you should have the gout superadded in your right hand, for then you would not be able to write to me.

We go on much as usual, sometimes very poorly, sometimes a little better: the latter is the case to-day. My rheumatism continues, but it is very moderate and tolerable. The Lord deals gently with us, and gives us many proofs that he does not afflict willingly.

The days speed away apace: each one bears away its own burden with it, to return no more. Both pleasures and pains that are past are gone for ever. What is yet future will likewise be soon past. The end is coming. O, to realize the thought, and to judge of things now in some measure suitable to the judgment we shall form of them when we are about to leave them all! Many things which now either elate or depress us, will then appear to be trifles light as air.

One thing is needful: to have our hearts united to the Lord in humble faith; to set him always before us; to rejoice in him as our shepherd and our portion; to submit to all his appointments, not of necessity, because he is stronger than we, but with a cheerful acquiescence, because he is wise and good, and loves us better than we do ourselves; to feed upon his truth; to have our understandings, wills, affections, imaginations, and memory, all filled and impressed with the great mysteries of redeeming love; to do all for him, to receive all from him, to find all in him. I have mentioned many things, but they are all comprised in one, a life of faith in the Son of God. We are empty vessels in ourselves, but we cannot remain empty. Except Jesus dwells in our hearts, and fills them with his power and presence, they will be filled with folly, vanity, and vexation.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

October, 26, 1779.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

BEING to go out of town to-day, I started up before light to write to you, and hoped to have sent you a long letter; when, behold! I could not get at any paper. I am now waiting for a peep at Mr. B—— at his lodgings, who came to town last night; and I shall write as fast as I can till I see him.

I feel for you a little in the same way you feel for yourself. I bear a friendly sympathy in your late sharp and sudden trial. I mourn with that part of you which mourns; but at the same time I rejoice in the proof you have, and which you give, that the Lord is with you of a truth. I rejoice on your account, to see you supported and comforted, and enabled to say, He has done all things well. I rejoice on my own account. Such instances of his faithfulness and all-sufficiency are very encouraging. We must all expect hours of trouble in our turn. We must all feel

in our concerns the vanity and uncertainty of creature-comforts. What a mercy is it to know from our own past experience, and to have it confirmed to us by the experience of others, that the Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and that he knoweth them that trust in him. Creatures are like candles, they waste while they afford us a little light, and we see them extinguished in their sockets one after another. But the light of the sun makes amends for them all. The Lord is so rich that he easily can, so good that he certainly will give his children more than he ever will take away. When his gracious voice reaches the heart, it is I, be not afraid; be still; and know that I am God: when he gives us an impression of his wisdom, power, love, and care, then the storm which attempts to rise in our natural passions is hushed into a calm; the flesh continues to feel, but the spirit is made willing. And something more than submission takes place,—a sweet resignation and acquiescence, and even a joy that we have any thing which we value, to surrender to his call.

I am yours, &c.

THE END.

