

TWENTY SIX
LETTERS
ON
RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS:

N A M E L Y,

- | | |
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| 1. On Trust in God. | 14. On Temptation. |
| 2. To a Student. | 15. A Plan of a Library. |
| 3. To a Friend, on 2 Cor. v. 10. | 16. On the Inefficacy of Knowledge. |
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| 10. On Grace in the Blade. | 23. On Simplicity, &c. |
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| 13. On hearing Sermons. | 26. On Gospel Illumination. |

By O M I C R O N.

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T W E N T Y S I X

L E T T E R S, &c.

L E T T E R I.

*On Trust in the Providence of G O D, and
Benevolence to his P O O R.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE more I think of the point
T you proposed to me, the more I
am confirmed to renew the ad-
vice I then gave. There is
doubtless such a thing as Christian pru-
dence, but, my friend, beware of coun-
terfeits. Self-love, and the evil heart of
unbelief, will endeavour to obtrude upon
us a prudence so called, which is as oppo-
site to the former, as darkness to light.
I do not say, that now you have a wife and

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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 honour of the gospel, such a love to his members, such a grateful sense of his mercies (especially by granting you, in this late instance of your marriage, the desire of your heart) and such an affiance in his providence and promises, that you find yourself very unwilling to be one six-pence 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 honour of being permitted to relieve the necessities of
his

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 necessaries, conveniences, 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 shew 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 shew you the more excellent way. If you had a little money to spare, would you not lend it 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. xix. 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 loth 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 disappointed. Read over *Matt. vi. 26—34.* Shall we confine that reasoning and those promises to the primitive times? Say not, “If the LORD would make win-
 “dows in heaven this thing might be.” He has more ways to bless and prosper those
 those

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 humour 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 honoured 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

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 for 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.

ON TRUST IN GOD. 7

pay, at an inn, if you do not take them in; but the poor need relief. One would almost think that passage, *Luke xiv. 12—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 not be afraid.

Consider, my friend, the LORD has done well for *you* likewise. He has settled you peaceably in a good and honourable interest, he has now 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

ON TRUST IN GOD. 9

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 will be far from deserving it. If the house which has 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 not 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 directions, that you may from the beginning adopt such a plan as may be most for your own comfort, the honour 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 this confidence in his word, you are happy. It is better than the possession of thousands by the year.

I am very sincerely

Yours,

OMICRON.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R 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 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

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 composition 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 honour 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

effect of his goodness and favour, no less than the latter?

To the question, How far it is 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 or speak to the 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 xv. 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

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. xli. 21. Psalm cxxvii. 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

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 an 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 our ministerial capacity, so far as it may be considered inherent in us. *Prov. xvi. 23. Matt. xiii. 52. 1 John i. 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,

guages, 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 a spiritual frame of mind, will prove (like *Saul's* armour 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, fulness, and spirit in the originals, which the best translations do not always express. When a word or phrase admits of various senses, the translators can only preserve *one*; and it is not

to be supposed (unless they were perfectly under the influence of the same infallible Spirit) that they should 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 much 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 starchness and over-accuracy will fetter you, will make your discourses lean and dry, preclude a useful variety, and favour more of the school-lamp, than of that heavenly fire which alone can make our meditations efficacious,
and

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 out-lines? 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

universally the same. And whenever you are to preach, remember, that some of all 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 shewing 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 to 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

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 learnt, 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 endeavouring to avail myself, to the best of my judgment, of present circumstances. The converse I have
with

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 most 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 pre-casse est bene studuisse.*" When I can find my heart in frame and liberty for prayer, every thing else is comparatively easy.

I shall 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

worldly

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, Dear SIR,

Your affectionate Friend and

Servant in the Gospel,

OMICRON.

LETTER

L E T T E R 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. v. 10. compared with Rom. xiv. 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 shew my willingness, if I can

I can

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.* v. 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 vail shall be wholly taken away. It is the part of faith to rest upon the plain declarations of scripture, without indulging a blameable 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 com-

fort 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

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 *Job* xiv. 28. and the Arminians on *James* ii. 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 Corinth.* v. 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 compleat in him, and cloathed 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 be ever 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. v. 9.* and their love, and consequently their happiness, seems inseparably connected with the consciousness of what they were, and what they had done, *Luke vii. 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 unspeakably 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 pur-

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suings the Israelites, they 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 the 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, *Matt. xxv. 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 colours. 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 endeavouring 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

able 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 the: 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 before the throne of grace, hereafter we shall meet in glory. The paper will allow no more. Believe me yours in the LORD,

OMICRON.



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 that 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
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of his people. You must therefore, as to circumstantials, 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 suitability in beginning and closing the day with prayer. In the morning, to acknowledge his goodness in our preservation through the night, and intreat 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 chuse those hours when you are least liable to be incommoded by the calls of business, and when the family can assemble with the most
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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
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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 performance of the duty, and likewise circumspect and consistent in every part of his behaviour at other times. By leading in the worship of God before children, servants, or strangers, a man gives bond (as it were) for his behaviour, 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
temper.

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 put 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

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 connections.

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
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then I judge it to be equally right and proper for either of them to pray with the other. Nor do I meet 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 a 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 Jenks's Devotions* are in many hands, and I doubt not but there are other excellent books of
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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 favoured with the gift and spirit of prayer; and accustom themselves, while they use a form, to intersperse 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 honouring 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.

ON FAMILY WORSHIP. 41

mises 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 honour and comfort those who thus honour him. Seasons will occur in which you shall know, and probably your neighbours 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 therefore shall only add a request, that in your addresses at the throne of grace you will remember,

S I R,

Your friend and servant in the gospel,

OMICRON.

LETTER

*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

when he comes upon the field of battle. If the LORD was to shew us the whole beforehand, 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 favours us with an humble and dependent spirit, a single eye and a simple heart, he will make every difficulty give way, and mountains shall 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
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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 was a layman. The work of the ministry is truly honourable, but, like the post of honour 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 with-

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out 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 shew 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

have had opportunity of roaring 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 a 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 expence of truth and faithfulness; for ordinarily we cannot

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 favour or the 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 shews a strong 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

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 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 connection between popularity and pride, as between fire and gunpowder, they cannot meet without an explosion, at least not unless

less 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,

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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 sight 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 an 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 in the pulpit. If you are enabled at some times to speak to the people with power, and to resemble *Sampson*, when, in the greatness of his strength he bore away the gates of the city, you will perhaps, at others, appear before them like *Sampson* 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,

DEAR SIR,

Your affectionate Friend,

OMICRON.



L E T T E R VI.

Of the practical INFLUENCE *of* FAITH.

S I R,

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

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 bridleth 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,

culcated, 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. Whoever 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 be likewise 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

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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 blessings 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

befal 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.

easy to be intreated, 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 endeavours 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 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

tion 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 of 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.

THE INFLUENCE OF FAITH. 61

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 shew the proper effects of that faith which justifies, which purifies the heart, worketh by love, and overcomes the world. An habitual endeavour 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

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,

DEAR SIR,

Your affectionate Friend,

OMICRON.



L E T T E R VII.

*On the Propriety of a MINISTERIAL ADDRESS
to the UNCONVERTED.*

S I R,

I N 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

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 the 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 exhort with sinners, usually contradict themselves, and retract in their application what they had laboured to establish in the course of their sermons.

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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 honoured with the greatest success in awakening and converting sinners, have generally
 been

been led to adopt the more popular way of *exhortation* and *addresses*; 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 labours 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 labourer 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 favour of those, who, besides stating the doctrines of the gospel, endeavour, by earnest persuasions and expostulations, to impress them upon the hearts of their hearers, and intreat 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 favour 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

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 subject 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 vi. 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 vi. 27. Luke xiii. 24—27. John xii. 35*. It appears, both from the context and the 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

think a good thought, and that “it is not
 “of him that willeth or of him that run-
 “neth, but of God, who sheweth mercy;”
 yet they plainly called upon sinners (and
 that before they had given evident signs
 that they were pricked to the heart, as *Acts*
 iii. 31.) “to repent, and to turn from their
 “vanities to the living God,” *Acts* iii. 19.
 and xiv. 15. and xvii. 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 there-
 fore 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 ab-
 solutely necessary; and that therefore, to
 exhort an unregenerate sinner to repent or
 believe, must be as vain and fruitless as to
 call

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. xxxvii. 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 work was

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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 topics which have a moral suitability 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

sliders 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 into the air, and our endeavours 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

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

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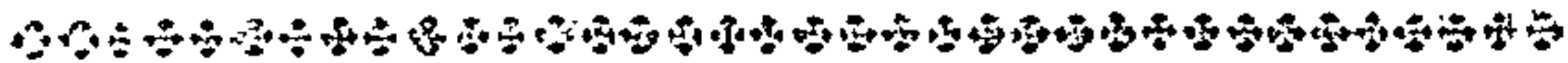
the whole of a sinner's salvation, from first to last, to the free sovereign grace of God.

We should undoubtedly endeavour 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 mean time, the path of duty, the good old way, lies plain before us. If when you are in the pulpit, the Lord favours 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

while your bowels yern 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 cxxxth *Psalms*, from page 242 to 247. *London* edit. 1609, which I recommend to your attentive consideration.

I am yours, &c.

OMICRON.



L E T T E R VIII.

On the inward Witness to the Ground and Reality of FAITH.

S I R,

I Readily offer you my thoughts on 1 *John* iii. 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

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best

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 believes 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

by which we are to judge whether we are believers or 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,” ver. 7, 8. *The Spirit*, in ver. 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 passeth 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 amongst 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 know-
ledge

ledge 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 by 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 know-
" ledge of CHRIST JESUS the 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 commended, 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 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 harrassed 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 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 circumstances of his work, there is (as in the features of

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 this 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 loaths 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 concernments 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 laboured, 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 laboured 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

“ 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 your sincere friend,

OMICRON.

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

vited 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 enquirer, and are desirous of forming your judgment agreeable 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.

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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* iii. 17. (which by the bye seems to speak strongly in favour 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 benefited 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 of doctrine, as to be able to argue, object, and fight in favour 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

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 stiled 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 favourable 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

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 then 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

(as I believe) who have told me they could not bear to read his ixth chap. 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

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 destruction. 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 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,

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 apprised 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 labour 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

in ourselves to withstand the forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil, 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 the doctrines, or perplexed because they cannot rightly understand those passages of scripture which seem to speak a different language.

language. But as light and knowledge increase, these difficulties are lessened. The LORD claims the honour, 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* xiv. 28—30. compared with *Phil.* i. 6. *Heb.* vii. 25. with *Rom.* viii. 34—39. *John* xiv. 19. with *John* xv. 1, 2. *John* iv. 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,

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 must pass away, but the promise; the oath, the blood on which my soul relies; affords 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

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 can 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

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 beforehand, 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

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 miscarriages 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. ¹

I am, dear Sir,

Your affectionate Friend,

OMICRON.

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LETTER

L E T T E R X.

[A] Or, GRACE *in the* BLADE, Mark iv. 28.

DEAR SIR,

ACCORDING to your desire I sit down to give you my general views of a progressive work of grace, in the severest 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 iv. 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 endeavour as clearly as I can to state what the scripture teaches us concerning the nature and essentials of a
work

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. ii. 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 xiv. 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 xvi. 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* v. 21. and chap. vi. 44, 63. *2 Cor.* iii. 18. *2 Thess.* iii. 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 be indeed so far wrought upon by outward means, as to stir up some desires and endeavours; 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* ii. 20. or he will sink into a self-righteous form of godliness, destitute of the power, *Luke* xviii. 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 apostasies 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 favour 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 v. 26.* wearied with vain expedients, finds itself worse and worse, and is gradually brought to see the necessity and sufficiency of the gospel-

gospel-salvation. [A] may soon be a believer thus far, That he believes the word of God, sees and feels things to be as they are there 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 aboundings 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 favour 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 wits 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
feels

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 sometimes create him trouble, and at others be mixed with some undue motions of Self, yet in its principle is highly desirable and commendable, *John xviii. 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, 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

and his peace and strength; *cæteris 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 hope of liberty which he longs for is approaching, when, by a farther discovery of the glorious gospel, it shall be given him to know his acceptance, and to rest upon the LORD's

finished

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 sincerely yours,

OMICRON.



L E T T E R XI.

[B] Or, GRACE *in the* EAR. Mark iv. 28.

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,
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by a spiritual apprehension of his complete suitability 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. viii. 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

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 shew him 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

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 over-rule 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

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ing 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 subtilty 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 fore 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

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* xiv. 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

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 experience of our evil natures. I do not say, that it 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 wis-

dom,

dom, 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
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to spiritual pride, to self-dependence, to vain confidence, to creature attachments, and a train of evils. The LORD often discovers to us one sinful disposition by exposing us to another. He sometimes shews 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 pity others. He does not call evil good, or good evil, but his own experiences

teach.

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. xvi. 63. "That thou mayest
 " remember, and be confounded, and ne-
 " ver 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, dear Sir,

Yours sincerely,

OMICRON.



L E T T E R XII.

[C] *Or, the full CORN in the EAR.*
 Mark iv. 28.

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

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 recal 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,

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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
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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.

I. Humility.

I. 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 stile 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. xvi. 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 wiliness, 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.

II. Spirituality. A spiritual taste and a disposition to account all things mean and
vain,

vain, in comparison of the knowledge and love of God in CHRIST, are essential to a true christian. The world can never be his prevailing choice, 1 John ii. 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 to 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 shewing 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 learnt, 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.

III. 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 is 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.

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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 remarkable thorny path in life; he may be a minister or layman. These circumstantials 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 allowances 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 spirit, 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 honourable 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

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 intreated, full of mercy and good works, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

I am, dear Sir,

Your sincere friend,

OMICRON.

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 favoured 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 intirely 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*”

“*ac-*”

“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 remarkably 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

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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 subtil 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 favourites, 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 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

own taste, and whom you are likely to hear with the most pleasure and advantage. Use some deliberation and much prayer in this matter. Intreat 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 at 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

of *Prov.* xxvii. 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 hands, 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 stately attend, is made very acceptable to you, you will be in the less danger of flighting *him*. But be careful that you do not flight 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.

ON HEARING SERMONS. 135

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 endeavour to combat and suppress them. Some persons are so curious, or rather so weak, that if their favourite 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 labours; 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 disappointments. If you fix your hopes upon the man, the LORD may

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 bearer*; 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,

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 jostles 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 senti-

sentiments of men of unstable minds, who are not found 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 subtilty, 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 shewn 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.

Further, 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.

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They are conscious that their warmest endeavours 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

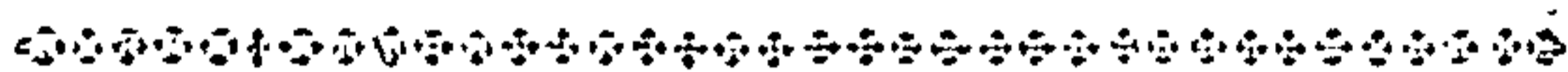
will remind you of this ; they will not wish to hold you in an implicit and blind obedience to what they say upon their own authority, nor desire that you should follow them farther than they have the scripture for their warrant. They would not be lords over your conscience, but helpers of your joy. 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. O this is a hateful spirit, that prompts hearers to

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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, your sincere friend and servant,

OMICRON.



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

versant 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.

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 endeavours fail, that he fights against the peace of the soul. He hates the LORD's people, grudges them all their privileges and all 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 shew them what is in their hearts, to make them truly sensible of their immediate and absolute dependance upon himself, and to quicken them to watchfulness 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 woeful backslidings of many professors, might

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 in 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

porting 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 cause 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 favour of his servant, was pleased to give Satan leave to try what he

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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 for ever 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 endeavour to preserve them from falls and blows, because we know they are easily broken. But if a man had the art of making

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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 in be 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 honour 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 strewed with flowers, when his was strewed 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 could 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
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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 wheroby 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 honour and a privilege which I am persuaded you will think you have not purchased too dear, by all that you have endured.

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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 *Sampson*, “ 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 endeavour to keep them upon their minds. It is hard for them, during the violence of
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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 the 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 prompted to blaspheme the name that he adores, or to commit such evils as even un-sanctified 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,

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fary, 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 ardour 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, disheartens and enfeebles 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, *Psalms xxxii. 3, 5.* If he cannot make them omit praying, he will repeatedly endeavour 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 purpose, appear as an angel of light.

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 ease; and we need not add to the burden, by talking 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

Your sincere friend;

OMICRON.

LETTER

LETTER XV.

A PLAN of a Compendious CHRISTIAN
LIBRARY.

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

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 expence 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 labouring 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,
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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 be probably led into error or prejudice before he is aware, by his attachment to a favourite 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 lead us of itself by the straightest path to wisdom, but will 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
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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 favoured 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

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 un sanctified 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 vail 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.

ness. The most laboured 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 reproveth, with an authority that can neither be disputed or evaded; and often communicates more light, motives, and influence, by a single sentence, to a plain unlettered believer, than he could derive from the voluminous commentaries of the learned. In a word, it answers the character the apostle gives it; "It is able to make us wise unto
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“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 sheweth 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

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 in tracing his wisdom in his works, if their inquiries are kept within due bounds, and in a proper subserviency 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

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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 colours, 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 scriptural 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

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 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 impression 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

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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 shews 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.

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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 Scripture. Many who are proud of their knowledge of what they might be safely ignorant of, are utter strangers to themselves. Having no acquaintance with the scripture, they have neither skill or 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; shews 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

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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 but of a few hints upon these extensive 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, Sir,

Yours,

OMICKON.

L E T T E R

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 scripture, 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 tinged 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;

ence; 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
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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 behaviour, 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 behaviour, from which the presence of a nobleman or 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 the angels are represented as veiling 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 into the air. Farther, 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 harrassed. 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 up-

on 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 the 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 circum-

stance of life, as it does for our acquiescing in his purpose to have mercy on 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

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selves 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 chuses for his people better than they could chuse 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,

ances, 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 the LORD had forgotten to be gracious.

I might proceed to shew the difference between our judgment when most enlightened, and our actual experience, with respect to every spiritual truth. We know
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there is no proportion between time and eternity, between God and the creature, the favour of the LORD and the favour 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 ænigma, what a poor inconsistent creature is a believer! In one view, how great is his character and privilege? He knows the LORD; he knows himself. His understanding is enlightened to apprehend and contemplate the great mysteries of the gospel.

pel. 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 foretaste 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,

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 endeavours, 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 honourably 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
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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 empty away. 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 sincerely yours,

OMICRON,



L E T T E R XVII.

On a BELIEVER'S FRAMES.

DEAR SIR,

YOU ask me, in your letter, What should one do when one finds one's self always still, quiet, and stupid, except in the pulpit; 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

familiar to me: I shall 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 the 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 favoured 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
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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 controul?

The apostle *Paul*, though favoured with a singular eminency in grace, felt at times that he had no sufficiency in himself 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 hav-

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ing 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 a continual conflict with in-dwelling 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

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 incapable 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 last a sufficient evidence that they are lamentably sick. But if we are conscious of the *desire*, if we seek it carefully

fully

fully 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 is 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 we are 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

were

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 unchangeable. 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,

cern, 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 labour 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, as such, to commit myself to him, 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 intreat him to lead me, and yet to want to choose my own

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 me 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 evil of my sinful nature, my incapacity and aversion to good, have been neither 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

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.

There is an inseparable connection 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 surpris'd that if the LORD suspends his influence for a moment, in that moment

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 temptation;" I allow it in a qualified sense, that is, It is 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 subtil, 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

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 wits 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 sincerely yours,

OMICRON.



L E T T E R XVIII.

THOUGHTS *on the* EXERCISE of SOCIAL PRAYER.

S I R,

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 spread 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 denomina-
tions

tions 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 intreated 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 our 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 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 favour 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.

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 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

pray with an unction and favour 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 fruit 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 beforehand 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 favourite word or expression which recurs too often in their prayers, and is frequently used as a mere expletive, having no necessary connection 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.

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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 favoured 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 neighbourhood.

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

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 inflections 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
 impor-

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-five LETTERS* published in 1775.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

OMICRON.

LETTER

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 armour, 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,

soldier,

foldier, 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 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 shew tendernefs 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.

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

soften their own hearts, then we might without 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 favour of those sentiments, which are least repugnant

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

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 upon 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 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 the scripture doctrines, by a clear and masterly elucidation of your subject. You may be instrumental to their edification, 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 shewing 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

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

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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 favour 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 expedient, 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,

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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 shews that if the service is honourable, it is dangerous. What will it profit a man if he gains his cause and silences 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 shewing that you are a disciple of JESUS, who, “ when he “ was reviled, reviled not again; when he “ suffered,

“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 favour and efficacy of our labours. If we act in a wrong spirit, we shall bring little glory to God, do little good to our fellow-creatures, and procure neither honour nor comfort to ourselves. If you can be content with shewing 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 applause 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 favoured with the unction of his holy Spirit.

I am, dear Sir, your affectionate servant,

OMICRON.

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 the post as you expected. But as the subject of it is of general concern, I hope you will not be displeas'd that I have taken this method. It would do honour 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 form'd 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 most practical

practical cases, supersede the necessity of long and elaborate disquisitions.

By the world, in the passage alluded to, *Rom. xii. 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 scripture does 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 deserts and uninhabited places, and wasted their lives at a distance from their fellow-creatures.

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 lights 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 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

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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 conveniences 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 cloaths 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

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,

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 activity of the men of the world. If they rise early and take rest late, their endeavours 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

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, chuses for him better than he could chuse 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 labour to overcome evil with good. Thus we shall shew 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 connections 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,

place, where things are purposely disposed to enflame 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 an 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. Who ever, 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 dishonour him;

him;

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 sincerely yours,

OMICRON.

L E T T E R 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 understand-

derstanding 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 eyesight, than many who can see, and may attain to considerable skill in them; but with respect to the true nature of light and colours, 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 hearsay-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 is 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 shew the intire 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 could 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 asser-
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tion; as they were capable of receiving, nor even explain, to their satisfaction, what they meant by light; 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,

despised,

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, endeavours, 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 person 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

words Blue or Red, is from the ideas which those words raise in the mind of a person who can distinguish colours 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.

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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 behoves 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 labour 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 upon 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.

Farther 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

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 surpris'd if they do not hold out, for they have no root. Though many such 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 may have made, were never capable of perceiving 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

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 shewed 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
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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 he 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

OMICRON.

L E T T E R 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

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 favoured 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 himself a mariner, because he had studied the art of navigation by the fire-side, though he had never seen the sea. Yet I hope, by my frequent converse with the LORD's poor
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(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 this 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 connections. Whereas the rich, who live under the power of sin, are unfaithful stewards of a larger trust, and by their pernicious influence are often instrumental in diffusing prophaneness and licentiousness through a country or a king-

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 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 has 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 chuse 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

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 honour, their safety, and their comfort. I have room for but a very brief illustration of these particulars.

Sanctified poverty is an honourable 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 honour which cometh from God only. The poor, who are “rich in faith, and heirs of “the kingdom,” are honoured 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* viii. 3. By this astonishing humiliation, he poured contempt upon all human glory, and made the state of poverty honourable, and now “he that reproacheth the poor despiseth his Maker.” And as he was, so were his apostles in the world: They were not only destitute of rank, titles, and estates, but were often in hunger and nakedness, and

and had no certain dwelling-place. To infer from hence, as some have done, that riches, and the accommodations of life, are unfuitable 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 honour, *Κρατισ*, 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 favoured servants, is honourable in the sight of GOD.

Again; Poverty is honourable, 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-sufficiency of God to those who trust in him, and the certain effect of the principles of the gospel, in supporting,

porting,

porting, 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 preachers, 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 honourable, 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 impertinences; they meet with little to stimulate their pride, or to soothe their vanity. They not only believe in their judgments, but are constrained to feel,

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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 favour. *Obadiab* was a servant of God, though he lived in the court of *Abab*. 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 staved 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,

least, no less certain and indisputable, I had almost said no less glorious, 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 inconveniences. But,

Secondly, I apprehend that the humble and believing poor have, in general, the greatest share of those consolations which are the effect 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 scripture intimates 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.

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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 pressures; 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 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
sup-

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Have not you, my friend, found these things true in your own experience? Yes; the LORD has sanctified your crosses, and
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supported you under them. Hitherto he has helped you, and he will be with you to the end. As you have followed 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 all tears from your eyes.” In the mean time be thankful that he honours 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 subtilty of Satan, at sometimes 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 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
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most to lose, have most to fear. That a man's life (the happiness of his life) "consisteth not in the abundance of the 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

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in you. Influenced by these views, I trust you can chearfully 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 your affectionate friend:

And servant in the gospel,

○ MICRON.



L E T T E R XXIII.

On SIMPLICITY and GODLY SINCERITY.

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 be then 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 enamoured 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

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 honour 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
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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 chuse him, and to yield ourselves to him, so as to place our happiness in his favour, 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 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

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 scripture 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 anything 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

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 a promise, he staggered not, *οὐδὲ διεκρίθη*, he did not dispute or question, but simply depended upon God who had spoken, and

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. xi. 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 i. 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 controul our enemies! Thus he has promised, and it belongs to gospel-simplicity to take his word against all discouragement.

couragements. 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. iii. 17, 18.* For want of this dependence many dishonour 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

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ing 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 un sanctified, 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 behaviour 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 dishonouring his name, and of grieving his Spirit, will teach them not only to avoid
gross.

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 endeavour (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, Sir, yours,

OMICRON,

L E T T E R

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 scripture, and therefore do not chuse flatly to contradict the apostle's testimony, 1 *John* i. 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

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 apostles days, should be now 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,

vilege, 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 main-
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tain communion with God. They have meat to eat which the world knows not of, honour 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

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 subtil temptations of Satan, our actual communion with God would be always lively,
sensible,

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 controul 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 intreat 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 learnt 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 that our comfortable sense of divine communion is rather transient than abiding.

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But the communion itself; upon which the life and safety of our souls depend, is never totally obstructed; nor can it be, unless God should 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 scripture 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, *Psalms xli. 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 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.

portion. They account his favour 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 veil 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, shews them the strong foundations and inviolable securities of his favour to-

wards 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 honour and privilege to have an unrestrained liberty of access to an earthly king; but what words can express the privilege and honour of believers, who, whenever they please, have audience of the

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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 connection 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
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their head 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 *his*. 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 endeavours 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

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

Affectionately yours,

OMICRON.

LETTER XXV.

OF 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 candour 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 experience, that all our abatements, declensions and languors, arise from a defect of Faith; from the imperfect man-

ner in which we take up the Revelation of our LORD JESUS CHRIST in the scripture. If our apprehensions of him were nearly suitable to the characters he bears in the word of God; 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. Living upon, 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 (not 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.

I. If faith arises from the knowledge of CHRIST, and this knowledge is only contained in the word of God,—it follows,

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that.

that a careful, frequent perusal of the scriptures which testify of Him, is a fit and a necessary means of improving our faith.

II. 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 shew them to the soul” by and according to the written word, *John* xvi. 14. — *2 Cor.* iii. 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 sermons, from one end of the week to the other, we should 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.

III. Another

III. Another means to this purpose, is Faithfulness to light already received, *John* xiv. 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.

teousness 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 desired 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, *Psalms* civ. 19. These all wait upon thee, thou
 “ givest 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 cases 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,

tle, 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 on 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. On 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 honours. 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.

tions 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 chosen race shall meet before the throne,
 Shall bless the conduct of his Grace, and make his 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 — many mansions — a place for you — a place, I trust, for worthless me.

I am, dear Sir,

Yours,

OMICRON.

LETTER.

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 presage 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

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 shew 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 veil, 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? *Pbil. iii. 7, 8.* Our last letter is as a comment upon his determination. Adored be the Grace that has given us to be like-minded, even to *acquaint 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 sun-shine 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 sha-
“dow 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 and experimental topics. *Nicodemus* is an encouraging example to those who are seeking the LORD'S salvation: he had received some favourable impressions of Jesus; but he

was

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* vii. 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 forsook 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."

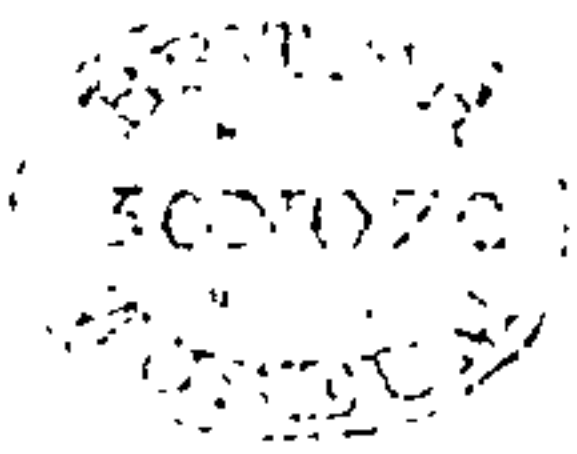
Hope then, my soul, against hope; though thy graces are faint and languid, he who planted them, will water his own work, and not suffer them wholly to die. He can make a little one as a thousand; at his presence mountains sink into plains, streams gush out of the flinty rock, and the wilderness blossoms as the rose. He can pull down what sin builds up, and build
up

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, L O R D J E S U S .

I am, dear Sir,

Yours, &c.

OMICRON.



F I N I S .

