

A LETTER TO THE REV. DR. RUTHERFORTH.*

REV. SIR,

March 28, 1768.

I. 1. YOUR charges, published five years ago, I did not see till yesterday. In the fourth I am unconcerned. The three former I purpose now to consider; and I do it the more cheerfully, because they are wrote with such seriousness as becomes the importance of the subject, and with less tartness than I am accustomed to expect from opponents of every kind.

2. But before I enter on the subject, suffer me to remove a stumbling-block or two out of the way. You frequently charge me with evasion; and others have brought the same charge. The plain case is this: I have wrote on various heads, and always as clearly as I could. Yet many have misunderstood my words, and raised abundance of objections. I answered them, by explaining myself, showing what I did not mean, and what I did. One and another of the objectors stretched his throat, and cried out, "Evasion! Evasion!" And what does all this outcry amount to? Why, exactly thus much: They imagined they had tied me so fast, that it was impossible for me to escape. But presently the cobwebs were swept away, and I was quite at liberty. And I bless God I can unravel truth and falsehood, although artfully twisted together. Of such evasion I am not ashamed. Let them be ashamed who constrain me to use it.

3. You charge me likewise, and that more than once or twice, with maintaining contradictions. I answer, (1.) If all my sentiments were compared together, from the year 1725 to 1768, there would be truth in the charge; for, during the latter part of this period, I have relinquished several of my former sentiments. (2.) During these last thirty years, I may have varied in some of my sentiments or expressions without observing it. (3.) I will not undertake to defend all the expressions which I have occasionally used during this time, but must desire men of candour to make allowance for those

* This Letter should have been inserted, Vol. IX., p. 173, but was overlooked at the proper time.—EDIT.

*Quas aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parum cavit natura.**

(4.) It is not strange if, among these inaccurate expressions, there are some seeming contradictions, especially considering I was answering so many different objectors, frequently attacking me at once, and one pushing this way, another that, with all the violence they were able. Nevertheless, (5.) I believe there will be found few, if any, real contradictions in what I have published for near thirty years.

4. I come now to your particular objections. I begin with the subject of your third charge,—assurances; because what I have to say upon this head will be comprised in few words. Some are fond of the expression: I am not; I hardly ever use it. But I will simply declare (having neither leisure nor inclination to draw the saw of controversy concerning it) what are my present sentiments with regard to the thing which is usually meant thereby.

I believe a few, but very few, Christians have an assurance from God of everlasting salvation; and that is the thing which the Apostle terms the plerophory or full assurance of hope.

I believe more have such an assurance of being now in the favour of God as excludes all doubt and fear. And this, if I do not mistake, the Apostle means by the plerophory or full assurance of faith.

I believe a consciousness of being in the favour of God (which I do not term plerophory, or full assurance, since it is frequently weakened, nay, perhaps interrupted, by returns of doubt or fear) is the common privilege of Christians, fearing God and working righteousness.

Yet I do not affirm there are no exceptions to this general rule. Possibly some may be in the favour of God, and yet go mourning all the day long. But I believe this is usually owing either to disorder of body, or ignorance of the Gospel promises.

Therefore I have not for many years thought a consciousness of acceptance to be essential to justifying faith.

And after I have thus explained myself once for all, I think without any evasion or ambiguity, I am sure without

* This quotation from Horace is thus translated by Smart:—"Which either inattention has dropped, or human nature has not sufficiently provided against."
—EDIT.

any self-contradiction, I hope all reasonable men will be satisfied. And whoever will still dispute with me on this head must do it for disputing's sake.

II. 1. In your first charge you undertake to prove that "Christianity does not reject the aid of human learning." (Page 1.)

Mr. B. thinks it does. But I am not accountable for him, from whom in this I totally differ. Yet you certainly include me when you say, "These new reformers maintain that every believer, who has the gift of utterance, is qualified to preach the Gospel." (Page 2.) I never maintained this. On many occasions I have maintained quite the contrary. I never said, "Human learning is an impediment to a Divine, which will keep him from the knowledge of the truth." (Page 3.) When, therefore, you say, "The contempt with which these men treat human learning," (*ibid.*) you do me much injustice; as likewise when you say, "They agree that human learning is of no use at all to a Preacher of the Gospel." I do not agree with any who speak thus. Yet you cite my own writings to prove it: "Farther Appeal," Part III., p. 106.* If I say any such thing, either there or any where else, let me bear the blame for ever.

2. For my deliberate thoughts on human learning, I appeal to my "Serious Address to the Clergy." I there lay down *ex professo* the qualifications, the learning in particular, which (as I apprehend) every Clergyman who can have, ought to have. And if any who are educated at the University have it not, they are inexcusable before God and man.

To put this matter beyond dispute, I appeal to something more than words. Can any man seriously think I despise learning who has ever heard of the school at Kingswood? especially if he knows, with how much care, and expense, and labour, I have kept it on foot for these twenty years? Let him but read the rules of Kingswood school, and he will urge this objection no more.

3. But you "employ illiterate Preachers." I cannot answer this better than by transcribing the very page to which you refer:—

"It will easily be observed that I do not depreciate learning of any kind. The knowledge of the languages is a

* Vol. VIII., p. 219, of the present edition of Mr. Wesley's Works.—EDIT.

valuable talent; so is the knowledge of the arts and sciences. Both the one and the other may be employed to the glory of God, and the good of men. But yet I ask, Where hath God declared in his word that he cannot, or will not, make use of men that have it not? Has Moses or any of the Prophets affirmed this? or our Lord, or any of his Apostles? You are sensible all these are against you. You know the Apostles themselves, all except St. Paul, were *ανδρες αγραμματοι και διωται*, common, unphilosophical, unlettered men."

4. Suffer me to add that paragraph, from which you strangely infer that I hold learning to be of "no use at all to a Preacher."

"I am bold to affirm that these unlettered men have help from God for that great work, the saving souls from death; seeing he hath enabled, and doth enable them still, to turn many to righteousness. Thus hath he destroyed the wisdom of the wise, and brought to nought the understanding of the prudent. When they imagined they had effectually shut the door, and blocked up every passage whereby any help could come to two or three Preachers, weak in body as well as soul, who, they might reasonably believe, would, humanly speaking, wear themselves out in a short time; when they had gained their point by securing, as they supposed, all the men of learning in the nation, He that sitteth in heaven laughed them to scorn, and came upon them by a way they thought not of. Out of the stones he raised up those who should beget children to Abraham. We had no more foresight of this than you. Nay, we had the deepest prejudices against it, until we could not but own that God gave wisdom from above to these unlearned and ignorant men; so that the work of the Lord prospered in their hand, and sinners were daily converted to God.

"Indeed, in the one thing which they profess to know, they are not ignorant men. I trust there is not one of them who is not able to go through such an examination, in substantial, practical, experimental divinity, as few of our candidates for holy orders, even in the University, (I speak it with sorrow and shame, and in tender love,) are able to do. But O! what manner of examination do most of those candidates go through! And what proof are the testimonials commonly brought (as solemn as the form is wherein they run) either of the piety or knowledge of those to whom

are entrusted those sheep which God hath purchased with his own blood?"

5. Yet you cite this very paragraph to prove that I "intimate, the help which these illiterate men receive from God is such as will enable them to preach Christ's Gospel without reading the Scriptures;" (page 9;) adding, "St. Paul's command to Timothy is a sufficient confutation of this groundless, or rather impious, pretence." I cannot conceive how you could imagine those words to intimate any such thing. Be this pretence whose it will, it is none of mine; it never entered into my thoughts.

6. But "there are in the Scriptures 'things hard to be understood.' And is every unlettered mechanic able to explain them?" (Page 11.) No, surely. But may we not likewise ask: Is every Clergyman able to explain them? You will not affirm it. However, "they are the safest guides who, from their childhood, have known the holy Scriptures, and have diligently and faithfully made use of all the helps to understand them which a liberal education has put into their hands, who have given attendance to reading, have meditated on those things, and have given themselves wholly to them." (Page 11.)

Certainly these are the safest guides. But how many, Sir, do you know of these? Suppose there are thirty thousand Clergymen in England, can you vouch this for ten thousand of them? I remember his late Grace of Canterbury (I mean Archbishop Potter) was occasionally saying that, on searching the records, he could find only three hundred of the Clergy who stood out against Popery in Queen Mary's reign. Do you think the other twenty-nine thousand seven hundred were "the safest guides?" I hope indeed things are mended now. I see no reason to doubt, but there are among the present Clergy a far greater number both of learned and pious men. And yet I fear we cannot count many thousands now that answer your strong description. May our good Lord increase their number, how many soever they be!

7. Now I beg leave to ask a question in my turn. Which do you think is the safest guide, a cursing, swearing, drinking Clergyman, (that such there are you know,) or a tradesman, who has in fact "from his childhood known the holy Scriptures," and has for five years (to say no more) faithfully and diligently made use of all the helps which the

English tongue has put into his hands, who has given attendance to reading, has meditated on these things, and given himself wholly to them? Can any reasonable man doubt one moment which of these is the safest guide?

Certainly "those who want these qualifications," who do not give attendance to reading, who do not meditate on those things, yea, and give themselves wholly to them, are ignorant and unstable men, in a very bad sense of the words. And let them understand philosophy ever so well, and be ever such critics in Greek and Hebrew, "they will pervert the Scriptures when they pretend to interpret them," (page 12,) and that not only to their own destruction.

8. But "many of these strolling Preachers are so ignorant as not to know that the Scriptures were not written in their mother tongue." (Page 8.) Indeed they are not: Whoever gave you that information abused your credulity. Most of the travelling Preachers in connexion with me are not ignorant men. As I observed before, they know all which they profess to know. The languages they do not profess to know; yet some of them understand them well. Philosophy they do not profess to know; yet some of them tolerably understand this also. They understand both one and the other better than great part of my pupils at the University did: And yet these were not inferior to their fellow-collegians of the same standing; (which I could not but know, having daily intercourse with all the under-graduates, either as Greek Lecturer or Moderator;) nor were these inferior to the under-graduates of other Colleges.

9. You conclude this charge. For "those whose minds are not stored with useful literature, the wisdom of the public has provided such guides as are both able and willing to show them the right way." (Page 13.) Would to God it had! But is it really so? Is there such a guide in every parish in England? Are then all the Rectors, Vicars, and Curates therein, "both able and willing" to guide all their parishioners to heaven? Do not both you and I, and all the world, know that this is not the case? Are there not many who are utterly unable to guide others, having neither learning nor understanding to guide themselves? Are there not more, who, if they are able, are not willing, taking no care or thought about it? They eat, and drink, and rise up to play,

"And leave to tatter'd crape the drudgery of prayer."

Once more. Are there not too many of those guides "whom the wisdom of the public has provided," who are neither able nor willing to guide others in the right way, being equally void of knowledge and piety? Is it then "the duty of the people to continue in the things which they have learned" from these guides? and "to hold fast the faithful word as they have been taught?" Why, what have they been taught? Just nothing. From these guides they have learned nothing, nor could learn anything, either from their precept or example. And are they "then only in danger when they do not follow these guides?" If they do follow them, they must follow them to hell. O Sir, why will you constrain me to show the nakedness of the land? I would far rather spread a veil over it. And I heartily wish I may never more be laid under a necessity of touching on this unpleasing subject.

10. Upon the whole, what I believe concerning learning, as I have again and again declared, is this: That it is highly expedient for a guide of souls, but not absolutely necessary. What I believe to be absolutely necessary is, a faith unfeigned, the love of God and our neighbour, a burning zeal for the advancement of Christ's kingdom, with a heart and life wholly devoted to God. These I judge to be necessary in the highest degree; and next to these, a competent knowledge of Scripture, a sound understanding, a tolerable utterance, and a willingness to be as the filth and offscouring of the world.

III. 1. You entitle your second charge, "An Examination of the Doctrine of the Methodists concerning inward Feelings."

I have explained myself so frequently and so largely upon this head already, that I flattered myself I should scarce have occasion to do it any more. But as I am still totally misunderstood and misrepresented, I am under a necessity of doing it yet again.

You state the question thus: "Have we any reason to believe that the mind has an inward feeling, which will enable it to perceive the ordinary influences of God's Spirit, so as to discern from whence they come?" (Page 15.)

I answer, (1.) The fruit of his ordinary influences are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness. (2.) Whoever has these, inwardly feels them; and if he understands

his Bible, he discerns from whence they come. Observe, what he inwardly feels is these fruits themselves: Whence they come, he learns from the Bible.

This is my doctrine concerning inward feelings, and has been for above these forty years. And this is clear to any man of common sense: I appeal to all the world if it is not. Only do not puzzle the cause by a cloud of words, and then lay the blame on me.

2. You state the question again: (Page 17:) "What I mean to affirm is, that, while the soul is united to such a body, the operations of external things" (say the operations of the Holy Spirit, for of these we are talking, and of these alone) "upon some one or more of these organs excite no inward feeling." Nay, nor outward neither. He must be a bold man that will affirm the contrary. If this be all that you mean to affirm, we agree to a hair's breadth.

3. You afterwards open yourself farther: "The mind, in its present situation, has no inward sense, by which the influence of external causes," (the influence of the Holy Spirit,) "or the causes themselves," (this is quite another question,) "may be felt or discerned. It then only perceives them when they affect the organs of the body, so as to raise a sensation in it by their means." (Page 22.)

Did ever the most illiterate Methodist talk in such a manner as this? "The mind then only perceives the influences of the Holy Spirit when they affect the organs of the body!"

If you say, 'I do not mean the Holy Spirit by external causes,' then you mean and say what is nothing to the purpose. For your very title confines you to the influences of the Holy Spirit, and you are, or should be, speaking of nothing else.

4. You go on: "It is a fundamental principle in the Methodist school, that all who come into it must renounce their reason." Sir, are you awake? Unless you are talking in your sleep, how can you utter so gross an untruth? It is a fundamental principle with us, that to renounce reason is to renounce religion; that religion and reason go hand in hand; and that all irrational religion is false religion. I therefore speak quite "consistently with my own doctrines" when I caution my followers against judging of the spirit by which any one speaks, by their own inward feelings; because

these, being of a doubtful nature, may come from God, or may not. You add, "What therefore shall we think of these inward feelings? They cannot be clear perceptions of the cause from which these affections or sentiments are derived." Who says they are? I never did. You cite the words wherein I say just the contrary. Whom then doth your arguing reprove? Do you "not fight as one that beateth the air?"

5. Mr. W. indeed "endeavours to explain away the doctrine of the Methodists concerning inward feelings." (Page 25.) That is, I plainly tell what I mean by those expressions. My words run thus: "By feeling, I mean being inwardly conscious of; by the operations of the Spirit, I do not mean the manner in which he operates, but the graces which he operates in a Christian." And again: "We believe that love, joy, peace, are inwardly felt, or they have no being; and that men are satisfied they have grace, first by feeling these, and afterwards by their outward actions."

One might imagine the controversy was now at an end. No: I am not a jot the nearer. For you go on: "If he and his brethren" (away with "his brethren;" the point lies between you and me) "mean no more than this, why do they speak of this matter in such language as makes their disciples pretend to have an inward sense, by which they feel sometimes the power of God, sometimes the Holy Ghost, sometimes Jesus Christ, and by which they can as clearly discern each of these while he acts upon them, as they can discern outward objects by their bodily senses?" (Page 26.) So now the matter is out! But who are the men? What are their names? And where do they live? If you know any who pretend to this, I do not; but I know they are none of my disciples. They never learned it of me. I have three grains of common sense, whether you believe it or not.

6. But you will pin it upon me, whether I will or no, and that by three passages of my own writings. (1.) "Lucy Godshall felt the love of God in an unusual manner." She did. I mean in an unusual degree. And what will you make of this? (2.) "When he examined some of his disciples, and they related their 'feeling the blood of Christ running upon their arms, or going down their throats, or poured like water upon their breast and heart,' did he tell them that these circumstances were all the dreams of a

heated imagination?" I did; I told them that these three circumstances, and several others of the same kind, were mere dreams, though some of those which they then related might be otherwise. I will tell you more: I was so disgusted at them for those dreams, that I expelled them out of the society.

The third passage is this: "We do speak of grace, (meaning thereby the power of God, which worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure,) that it is as perceptible to the heart, while it confirms, refreshes, purifies, and sheds the love of God abroad therein, as sensible objects are to the senses." (Page 27.) I do speak thus; and I mean thereby that the comfort which God administers, not his power distinct from it, the love and purity which he works, not his act of working distinguished from it, are as clearly discernible by the soul as outward objects by the senses. And I never so much as dreamed that any one could find any other meaning in the words.

7. I cannot close this subject of inward feelings without recurring to the twentieth page of your tract. Here you attempt to prove that these Preachers confine the influences of God's Holy Spirit to themselves and their followers; because, say you, "no one else feels its workings;" none but they and their followers. Observe; it is not I affirm this, but you, that "none but Methodists feel the workings of the Spirit." But how will you reconcile this assertion with the seventeenth Article of our Church, which teaches, that all "godly persons feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ mortifying the works of the flesh, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things?" It is in this sense only, that I did and do assert all good men feel the working of the Holy Spirit. If any can prove they do not, I stand condemned; if not, none can condemn me concerning inward feelings.

8. You subjoin some reflections on another subject,—bodily emotions of various kinds. Before we reason upon it, let us state the fact. These outward symptoms are not at all times, nor in all places; for two or three years they were not constant, but frequent in London, Bristol, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and in a few other places. They sometimes occur still, but not often. And we do not regard whether they occur or not, knowing that the essence of religion, righteousness,

peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, is quite independent upon them.

Upon this you ask, "Are these the fruits of the Spirit?" (Page 31.) I answer, No; who ever thought they were? You ask, 2. "Are these the marks whereby we may be assured that they who are thus affected discern its workings?" You answer for me, "They themselves do not believe it. Nay, Mr. W. declares it is his opinion, 'Some of these agonies are from the devil;' and makes no doubt but 'it was Satan tearing them as they were coming to Christ.'" (Page 33.) But if I myself declare thus, what room was there for the preceding questions? Now certainly you must be quite satisfied. No; you are as far from it as ever! You gravely ask, "What experienced physicians of the soul must these be, who are unable to distinguish the influence of the Holy Ghost from the tearing of Satan?" Why, Sir, you this instant repeated the very words wherein I do distinguish them. "But you ascribe the same symptoms sometimes to the one, and sometimes to the other." Indeed I do not: I always ascribe these symptoms to Satan tearing them.

9. You add in a marginal note, "Mr. W. sometimes denies that he considers these fits as signs of the new birth." I always deny it, if you mean by signs anything more than something which may accidentally attend it. Yet "in some of his writings he calls these fallings and roarings by the name of convictions. He says, 'Many were wounded deeply; but none were delivered from that painful conviction.' 'Monday 30th. Two more were in strong pain, both their souls and bodies being well nigh torn asunder.'" Very true; but in which of these passages do I "call fallings and roarings by the name of convictions?" Excuse me; if I cannot distinguish God from the devil, I can at least distinguish the soul from the body. For do I ever confound bodily disorders with sorrow or pain of mind?

10. However, "Mr. W. speaks of these at least as outward signs," that the new birth "is working in those that have them." (Page 23.) I speak of them as "outward symptoms which have often accompanied the inward work of God." A peculiar instance of this I relate in the first Journal, which you are at the pains to transcribe. And, as you observe, "there are many instances in the same Journal, in which I express myself in the same manner." But what

does all this prove? Just what I said before, and not one jot more; I speak of them as "outward symptoms which have often accompanied the inward work of God." Often, I say, not always, not necessarily: They may, or they may not. This work may be without those symptoms, and those symptoms may be without this work.

11. But you say, "The following account, which he writes to one of his correspondents, will make the matter clear. 'I have seen very many persons changed in a moment from the spirit of fear, horror, despair, to the spirit of love, joy, peace; and from sinful desires, till then reigning over them, to a pure desire of doing the will of God. That such a change was then wrought, appears not from their shedding tears only, or falling into fits, or crying out, (these are not the fruits or signs whereby I judge,) but from the whole tenor of their lives.'" (Page 33.)

Now I should really imagine this passage proves quite the contrary of what you intend. Yea, that it is full and decisive. "But," say you, "though he denies these to be the fruits by which he judges that this inward change is wrought, yet he looks upon them as signs that it is working." Yes, in the sense above explained. While God was inwardly working, these outward signs often appeared; nay, almost daily in Bristol, during the first summer which I spent there.

12. Upon the whole, I declare once for all, (and I hope to be troubled no more upon the subject,) I look upon some of those bodily symptoms to have been preternatural or diabolical, and others to have been effects which in some circumstances naturally followed from strong and sudden emotions of mind. Those emotions of mind, whether of fear, sorrow, or joy, I believe were chiefly supernatural, springing from the gracious influences of the Spirit of God which accompanied his word.

13. I believe this is all the answer I need give to the severe accusation you have brought against me; for which, I trust, men of candour will discern there was not the least foundation. With respect to the first point, despising learning, I am utterly clear. None can bring any proof, or shadow of proof, that I do not highly esteem it. With regard to the assurance of faith and hope, I have spoken as clearly as I can; and I trust serious men, who have some experience in religion, will not find much to condemn therein.

And with respect to inward feelings, whoever denies them, in the sense wherein alone I defend them, must deny all the life and power of religion, and leave nothing but a dead, empty form. For take away the love of God and our neighbour, the peace of God, and joy in the Holy Ghost, or, which comes to the same, deny that they are felt, and what remains but a poor, lifeless shadow?

14. This is what I do and must contend for. "I thought you had contended for quite another thing." If you had only thought so, or only said so in private conversation, it had been of no great consequence. But it was of consequence, when you not only brought a false accusation against your brother before so venerable an assembly, but also published it to all the world. Surely the first step was enough, and more than enough. Was there nothing more important wherewith to entertain the stewards of the mysteries of God, than the mistakes, if they really had been such, of the Methodists, so called? Had they no enemies more dangerous than these? Were they not in more imminent danger, if of no outward sin, nothing in their behaviour or conversation unworthy of their calling, yet of neglect, of remissness, of not laying out all their time, and care, and pains, in feeding the sheep which Christ hath purchased with his own blood? Were none of them in danger of levity, of pride, of passion, of discontent, of covetousness? Were none of them seeking the praise of men more than the praise of God? O Sir, if this was the case of any of them, I will not say how trifling, how insignificant, but how mischievous to these, how fatal, how destructive must a charge of this kind be! by which they were led, not to examine themselves, to consider either their own hearts or ways, but to criticise on others, on those with whom nine in ten had no manner of concern! Surely so solemn an opportunity might be improved to far other purposes! even to animate every one present to offer up himself a living sacrifice to God, that so he may be ready to be offered upon the sacrifice and service of his faith; to have one thing only in his eye, to desire to aim at nothing else, not honour, not ease, not money, not preferment, but to save his own soul and them that hear him.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your brother and servant for Christ's sake.
