

Anabaptist, and one, if not two, of the Teachers among the Presbyterians here, who, I hope, love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and teach the way of God in truth.

O cease not, ye that are highly favoured, to beseech our Lord that he would be with us even to the end; to remove that which is displeasing in his sight, to support that which is weak among us, to give us the whole mind that was in him, and teach us to walk even as he walked! And may the very God of peace fill up what is wanting in your faith, and build you up more and more in all lowliness of mind, in all plainness of speech, in all zeal and watchfulness; that He may present you to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that ye may be holy and unblamable in the day of his appearing.

XXXVII.—*To the Bishop of Bristol.*

MY LORD,

October 13, 1741.

SEVERAL persons have applied to me for baptism. It has pleased God to make me instrumental in their conversion. This has given them such a prejudice for me, that they desire to be received into the Church by my ministry. They choose likewise to be baptized by immersion, and have engaged me to give your Lordship notice, as the Church requires.

XXXVIII.—*To Mr. John Smith.**

SIR,

September 28, 1745.

1. I WAS determined, from the time I received yours, to answer it as soon as I should have opportunity. But it was

* The person who addressed a series of letters to Mr. Wesley in manuscript under the assumed name of John Smith, and to whom the following answers were directed, there is reason to believe, was Dr. Thomas Secker, at that time Bishop of Oxford, and afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. Secker was born in 1693. The writer of these letters says, "I was confirmed about the age of fourteen. What childish apprehensions I might have had before that time I cannot well say, but for about forty years since," &c.—These two periods added together will give us fifty-four years, or rather fifty-three, from his word "about." Let this be added to 1693, the year of Secker's birth, and it gives us 1746, the exact date of his letter. His letters are given entire in the Appendix to Moore's Life of Mr. Wesley, vol. ii., p. 475, &c.; and some account of the correspondence will be found in the same volume, p. 95, &c.—EDIT.

the longer delayed, because I could not persuade myself to write at all, till I had leisure to write fully. And this I hope to do now, though I know you not, no, not so much as your name. But I take for granted you are a person that fears God, and that speaks the real sentiments of his heart. And on this supposition I shall speak, without any suspicion or reserve.

2. I am exceedingly obliged by the pains you have taken to point out to me what you think to be mistakes. It is a truly Christian attempt, an act of brotherly love, which I pray God to repay sevenfold into your bosom. Methinks I can scarce look upon such a person, on one who is "a contender for truth and not for victory," whatever opinion he may entertain of me, as an adversary at all. For what is friendship, if I am to account him my enemy who endeavours to open my eyes, or to amend my heart?

I. 3. You will give me leave (writing as a friend rather than a disputant) to invert the order of your objections, and to begin with the third, because, I conceive, it may be answered in fewest words. The substance of it is this: "If in fact you can work such signs and wonders as were wrought by the Apostles, then you are entitled (notwithstanding what I might otherwise object) to the implicit faith due to one of that order." A few lines after you cite a case related in the Third Journal, page 88,* and add: "If you prove this to be the fact, to the satisfaction of wise and good men, then I believe no wise and good men will oppose you any longer. Let me therefore rest it upon your conscience, either to prove this matter of fact, or to retract it. If upon mature examination it shall appear that designing people imposed upon you, or that hysterical women were imposed upon themselves, acknowledge your zeal outran your wisdom."

4. Surely I would. But what, if on such examination it shall appear that there was no imposition of either kind?—to be satisfied of which, I waited three years before I told the story. What, if it appear by the only method which I can conceive, the deposition of three or four eye and ear witnesses, that the matter of fact was just as it is there related, so far as men can judge from their eyes and ears; will it follow, that I am entitled to demand the implicit faith which was due to an Apostle? By no means. Nay, I know

* Vol. I., p. 231, of the present edition.—EDIT.

not that implicit faith was due to any or all of the Apostles put together. They were to prove their assertions by the written word. You and I are to do the same. Without such proof I ought no more to have believed St. Peter himself, than St. Peter's pretended successor.

5. I conceive, therefore, this whole demand, common as it is, of proving our doctrine by miracles, proceeds from a double mistake: (1.) A supposition, that what we preach is not provable from Scripture;—for if it be, what need we farther witnesses? “To the law and to the testimony!” (2.) An imagination, that a doctrine not provable by Scripture might nevertheless be proved by miracles. I believe not. I receive the written word as the whole and sole rule of my faith.

II. 6. Perhaps what you object to my phraseology may be likewise answered in few words. I thoroughly agree, that it is best to “use the most common words, and that in the most obvious sense;” and have been diligently labouring after this very thing for little less than twenty years. I am not conscious of using any uncommon word, or any word in an uncommon sense; but I cannot call those uncommon words which are the constant language of holy writ. These I purposely use; desiring always to express Scripture sense in Scripture phrase. And this I apprehend myself to do, when I speak of salvation as a present thing. How often does our Lord himself do thus! how often his Apostles, St. Paul particularly! Insomuch that I doubt whether we can find six texts in the New Testament, perhaps not three, where it is otherwise taken.

7. The term “faith” I likewise use in the scriptural sense, meaning thereby “the evidence of things not seen.” And, that it is scriptural, appears to me a sufficient defence of any way of speaking whatever. For however the propriety of those expressions may vary which occur in the writings of men, I cannot but think those which are found in the book of God will be equally proper in all ages. But let us look back, as you desire, to the age of the Apostles. And if it appear that the state of religion now is, according to your own representation of it, the same, in substance, as it was then, it will follow that the same expressions are just as proper now, as they were in the apostolic age.

8. “At the time of the first preaching of the Gospel,” (as

you justly observe,) "both Jews and Gentiles were very negligent of internal holiness, but laid great stress on external rites, and certain actions, which if they performed according to the due forms of their respective religions, they doubted not but those works would render them acceptable to God. The Apostles therefore thought they could not express themselves too warmly against so wicked a persuasion, and often declare that we cannot be made righteous by works; (that is, not by such outward works as were intended to commute for inward holiness;) but 'by faith in Christ;' that is, by becoming Christians both in principle and practice."

9. I have often thought the same thing, namely, that the Apostles used the expression, "salvation by faith," (importing inward holiness by the knowledge of God,) in direct opposition to the then common persuasion of salvation by works; that is, going to heaven by outward works, without any inward holiness at all.

10. And is not this persuasion as common now as it was in the time of the Apostles? We must needs go out of the world, or we cannot doubt it. Does not every one of our churches (to speak a sad truth) afford us abundant instances of those who are as negligent of internal holiness, as either the Jews or ancient Gentiles were? And do not these at this day lay so great a stress on certain external rites, that, if they perform them according to the due forms of their respective communities, they doubt not but those works will render them acceptable to God? You and I therefore cannot express ourselves too warmly against so wicked a persuasion; nor can we express ourselves against it in more proper terms than those the Apostles used to that very end.

It cannot be denied that this apostolical language is also the language of our own Church.* But I waive this. What is scriptural in any Church, I hold fast: For the rest, I let it go.

III. 11. But the main point remains: You think the doctrines I hold are not founded on holy writ. Before we inquire into this, I would just touch on some parts of that abstract of them which you have given.

"Faith (instead of being a rational assent and moral virtue, for the attainment of which men ought to yield the utmost attention and industry) is altogether supernatural,

and the immediate gift of God." I believe, (1.) That a rational assent to the truth of the Bible is one ingredient of Christian faith. (2.) That Christian faith is a moral virtue in that sense wherein hope and charity are. (3.) That men ought to yield the utmost attention and industry for the attainment of it. And yet, (4.) That this, as every Christian grace, is properly supernatural, is an immediate gift of God, which he commonly gives in the use of such means as he hath ordained.

I believe it is generally given in an instant; but not arbitrarily, in your sense of the word; not without any regard to the fitness (I should say, the previous qualifications) of the recipient.

12. "When a man is pardoned, it is immediately notified to him by the Holy Ghost, and that (not by his imperceptibly working a godly assurance, but) by such attestation as is easily discernible from reason or fancy."

I do not deny that God imperceptibly works in some a gradually increasing assurance of his love; but I am equally certain, he works in others a full assurance thereof in one moment. And I suppose, however this godly assurance be wrought, it is easily discernible from bare reason, or fancy.

"Upon this infallible notification he is saved, is become perfect, so that he cannot commit sin."

I do not say, this notification is infallible in that sense, that none believe they have it, who indeed have it not; neither do I say that a man is perfect in love, the moment he is born of God by faith. But even then, I believe, if he keepeth himself, he doth not commit (outward) sin.

13. "This first sowing of the first seed of faith, you cannot conceive to be other than instantaneous, (ordinarily,) whether you consider experience, or the word of God, or the very nature of the thing. Whereas all these appear to me to be against you. To begin with experience: I believe myself to have as steady a faith in a pardoning God as you can have; and yet I do not remember the exact day when it was first given."

Perhaps not. Yours may be another of those exempt cases, which were allowed before.

But "the experience," you say, "of all the pious persons" you "are acquainted with, is the very same with" yours. You will not be displeased with my speaking freely. How

many truly pious persons are you so intimately acquainted with, as to be able to interrogate them on the subject? with twenty? with ten? If so, you are far happier than I was for many years at Oxford. You will naturally ask, with how many truly pious persons am I acquainted, on the other hand. I speak the truth in Christ, I lie not: I am acquainted with more than twelve or thirteen hundred persons, whom I believe to be truly pious, and not on slight grounds, and who have severally testified to me with their own mouths that they do know the day when the love of God was first shed abroad in their hearts, and when his Spirit first witnessed with their spirits, that they were the children of God. Now, if you are determined to think all these liars or fools, this is no evidence to you; but to me it is strong evidence, who have for some years known the men and their communication.

14. As to the word of God, you well observe, "We are not to frame doctrines by the sound of particular texts, but the general tenor of Scripture, soberly studied and consistently interpreted." Touching the instances you give, I would just remark, (1.) To have sin, is one thing; to commit sin, is another. (2.) In one particular text it is said, "Ye are saved by hope;" perhaps in one more, (though I remember it not,) "Ye are saved by repentance, or holiness." But the general tenor of Scripture, consistently interpreted, declares, "We are saved by faith." (3.) Will either the general tenor of Scripture, or your own conscience, allow you to say that faith is the gift of God in no other or higher sense than riches are? (4.) I entirely agree with you that the children of light walk by the joint light of reason, Scripture, and the Holy Ghost.

15. "But the word of God appears to" you "to be manifestly against such an instantaneous giving of faith; because it speaks of growth in grace and faith as owing to the slow methods of instruction." So do I. But this is not the question. We are speaking, not of the progress, but of the first rise, of faith. "It directs the gentle instilling of faith, by long labour and pious industry." Not the first instilling; and we speak not now of the continuance or increase of it. "It compares even God's part of the work to the slow produce of vegetables, that, while one plants and another waters, it is God all the while who goes on giving

the increase." Very true. But the seed must first be sown, before it can increase at all. Therefore, all the texts which relate to the subsequent increase are quite wide of the present question.

Perhaps your thinking the nature of the thing to be so clearly against me may arise from your not clearly apprehending it. That you do not, I gather from your own words: "It is the nature of faith to be a full and practical assent to truth." Surely no. This definition does in no wise express the nature of Christian faith. Christian saving faith is a divine conviction of invisible things; a supernatural conviction of the things of God, with a filial confidence in his love. Now, a man may have a full assent to the truth of the Bible, (probably attained by the slow steps you mention,) yea, an assent which has some influence on his practice, and yet not have one grain of this faith.

16. I should be glad to know to which writings in particular of the last age you would refer me, for a thorough discussion of the Calvinistical points. I want to have those points fully settled; having seen so little yet wrote on the most important of them, with such clearness and strength as one would desire.

17. I think your following objections do not properly come under any of the preceding heads: "Your doctrine of momentaneous illapse, &c., is represented by your adversaries as singular and unscriptural; and that these singularities are your most beloved opinions and favourite tenets, more insisted upon by you than the general and uncontroverted truths of Christianity: This is their charge." And so, I doubt, it will be to the end of the world: For, in spite of all I can say, they will represent one circumstance of my doctrine (so called) as the main substance of it. It nothing avails, that I declare again and again, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." I believe this love is given in a moment. But about this I contend not. Have this love, and it is enough. For this I will contend till my spirit returns to God. Whether I am singular or no, in thinking this love is instantaneously given, this is not my "most beloved opinion." You greatly wrong me when you advance that charge. Nay, I love, strictly speaking, no opinion at all. I trample upon opinion, be it right or wrong. I want, I value, I preach, the love of God and man. These are my

“favourite tenets,” (if you will have the word,) “more insisted on” by me ten times over, both in preaching and writing, than any or all other subjects that ever were in the world.

18. You will observe, I do not say (and who is there that can ?) that I have no singular opinion at all ; but this I say, that, in my general tenor of preaching, I teach nothing, as the substance of religion, more singular than the love of God and man : And it was for preaching this very doctrine, (before I preached or knew salvation by faith,) that several of the Clergy forbade me their pulpits.

“But if it be notorious, that you are frequently insisting on controverted opinions.” If it be, even this will not prove the charge ; namely, “that those are my most beloved opinions, and more insisted upon by me, than the uncontroverted truths of Christianity.”

“No singularities,” is not my answer ; but that no singularities are my most beloved opinions ; that no singularities are more, or near so much, insisted on by me, as the general, uncontroverted truths of Christianity.

19. “Another objection,” you say, “I have to make to your manner of treating your antagonists. You seem to think you sufficiently answer your adversary, if you put together a number of naked scriptures that sound in your favour. But remember, the question between you and them is, not whether such words are Scripture, but whether they are to be so interpreted.”

You surprise me ! I take your word, else I should never have imagined you had read over the latter Appeal ; so great a part of which is employed in this very thing, in fighting my ground, inch by inch ; in proving, not that such words are Scripture, but that they must be interpreted in the manner there set down.

20. One point more remains, which you express in these words : “When your adversaries tax you with differing from the Church, they cannot be supposed to charge you with differing from the Church as it was a little after the Reformation, but as it is at this day. And when you profess great deference and veneration for the Church of England, you cannot be supposed to profess it for the Church and its Pastors in the year 1545, and not rather in the year 1745. If, then, by ‘the Church of England’ be meant (as ought to

be meant) the present Church, it will be no hard matter to show that your doctrines differ widely from the doctrines of the Church."

Well, how blind was I! I always supposed, till the very hour I read these words, that when I was charged with differing from the Church, I was charged with differing from the Articles or Homilies. And for the compilers of these, I can sincerely profess great deference and veneration. But I cannot honestly profess any veneration at all for those Pastors of the present age, who solemnly subscribe to those Articles and Homilies which they do not believe in their hearts. Nay, I think, unless I differ from these men (be they Bishops, Priests, or Deacons) just as widely as they do from those Articles and Homilies, I am no true Church-of-England man.

Agreeably to those ancient records, by "Christian" or "justifying faith" I always meant, faith preceded by repentance, and accompanied or followed by obedience. So I always preached; so I spoke and wrote. But my warm adversaries, from the very beginning, stopped their ears, cried out, "An heretic! An heretic!" and so ran upon me at once.

21. But I let them alone: You are the person I want, and whom I have been seeking for many years. You have understanding to discern, and mildness to repeat, (what would otherwise be,) displeasing truths. Smite me friendly and reprove me: It shall be a precious balm; it shall not break my head. I am deeply convinced that I know nothing yet as I ought to know. Fourteen years ago, I said, (with Mr. Norris,) "I want heat more than light;" but now I know not which I want most. Perhaps God will enlighten me by your words. O speak and spare not! At least, you will have the thanks and prayers of

Your obliged and affectionate servant.

XXXIX.—*To the Same.*

SIR,

December 30, 1745.

I AM obliged to you for your speedy and friendly answer; to which I will reply as clearly as I can.

1. If you have leisure to read the last Appeal, you will easily judge, how much I insist on any opinions.

2. In writing practically, I seldom argue concerning the meaning of texts; in writing controversially, I do.