

believe it was to obviate this very supposition, that my preaching has so rarely made any impression at all, till the novelty of it was over. When I had preached more than sixscore times at this town, I found scarce any effect; only that abundance of people heard, and gaped and stared, and went away much as they came. And it was one evening, while I was in doubt if I had not laboured in vain, that such a blessing of God was given, as has continued ever since, and I trust will be remembered unto many generations.

You ascribe it likewise in part to "a natural knack of persuasion." If either by a natural or an acquired power of persuasion I can prevail upon sinners to turn to God, am I to bury even that talent in the earth? "No; but try if you cannot do more good in a College or in a parish." I have tried both, and I could not do any substantial good, either to my pupils or my parishioners. Among my parishioners in Lincolnshire, I tried for some years; but I am well assured I did far more good to them by preaching three days on my father's tomb, than I did by preaching three years in his pulpit.

But you "know no call I have to preach up and down; to play the part of an itinerant Evangelist." Perhaps you do not. But I do: I know God hath required this at my hands. To me, his blessing my work is an abundant proof; although such a proof as often makes me tremble. But "is there not pride or vanity in my heart?" There is; yet this is not my motive to preaching. I know and feel that the spring of this is a deep conviction, that it is the will of God, and that were I to refrain, I should never hear that word, "Well done, good and faithful servant;" but, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

XLII.—*To the Same.*

SIR,

ST. IVES, July 10, 1747.

1. You put me in mind of an eminent man, who, preaching at St. James's, said, "If you do not repent, you will go to a place which I shall not name before this audience." I cannot promise so much, either in preaching or writing, before any audience, or to any person whatever. Yet I am not conscious of doing this very often,—of "profusely flinging about everlasting fire;" though it is true,

I mentioned it in my last letter to you, as I have done now, a second time; and perhaps I may mention it yet again. For, to say the truth, I desire to have both heaven and hell over in my eye, while I stand on this isthmus of life, between these two boundless oceans; and I verily think the daily consideration of both highly becomes all men of reason and religion.

2. I think likewise, (or I would not spend five words upon the head,) that these are nearly concerned in our present question. To touch only on one branch of it: If I live in wilful sin, in a sinful "deviation from established order," am I not in the way to hell? I cannot take it any otherwise. I cannot help "blending these two inquiries together." I must therefore speak seriously, or not at all; and yet, I trust, "without losing my temper." Do you complain of this first, that I may not complain? It appears to me that you show more eagerness of spirit, more warmth and resentment, in your last than you ever have done from the beginning.

3. You spoke of "a number of unsent persons going about and preaching the worst of heresies." I answered, "Within these nine years I have heard of two, and no more, who have gone about thus, though I doubt neither sent of God nor man." Their names were Jonathan Wildboar, and Thomas Smith, *alias* Moor, *alias* I know not what; for I fear he changed his name as often as his place. It is not unlikely that either of these might steal as well as lie, which they have done abundantly, particularly in claiming acquaintance with Mr. Whitefield or me, wherever they judged it would recommend them to their hearers. I should not be surprised to hear of two more such; but I have not yet, in all the counties I have gone through between London and Berwick-upon-Tweed, or between Deal and the Land's-End.

4. I would to God, all the Clergy throughout the land were "zealous for inward, solid virtue." But I dare not say one in ten of those I have known are so in any degree. The two Clergymen of this place, on a late public occasion, were led home at one or two in the morning in such a condition as I care not to describe. One of them is Rector of Lelant also, (a parish east of St. Ives,) of Twidnack, to the south, and Zennor, to the west. At Zennor he keeps another

assistant, and one who is just as sober as himself, and near as zealous,—not indeed for inward or outward virtue, but against these “scoundrels that pretend to preach in his parish.”

5. I never “attempted to deny” that the novelty of our manner of preaching has induced thousands and ten thousands to hear us, who would otherwise never have heard us at all, nor perhaps any other Preacher. But I utterly deny that “the effects wrought on many of them that heard were owing to novelty, and that only.” The particular effects wrought at Epworth were these: Many drunkards, many unjust and profane men, on whom both my father and I had for several years spent our strength in vain, from that time began to live, and continue so to do, a sober, righteous, and godly life. Now, I deny that this effect can be owing to novelty, or to any principle but the power of God.

If it be asked, But were there not “the same hearers, the same Preachers, and the same God to influence, in the church, as on the tomb-stone?” I answer, (1.) There were not all the same hearers in the church; not above one third of them. (2.) There was the same Preacher in the church, but he did not then preach the same doctrine; and therefore, (3.) Though there was the same God, there was not the same influence, or blessing from him.

6. The sum of what I offered before, concerning perceptible inspiration, was this: “Every Christian believer has a perceptible testimony of God’s Spirit, that he is a child of God.” You objected, that there was not one word said of this, either in the Bible, or in the “Appeal,” to which I referred. I replied, “I think there is in the Bible, in the sixteenth verse of the eighth chapter to the Romans. And in the ‘Farther Appeal,’ this place is proved to describe the ordinary privilege of every Christian believer.”

This is there shown, both by Scripture, by reason, and by authority, particularly that of Origen and Chrysostom, whom his Lordship of Lichfield had cited in his Charge, as asserting just the contrary. But waving authorities, I reasoned thus: “You allow there is a testimony of the Spirit with our spirit, that we are the children of God. But you say, it is not a perceptible one. How is this? Let us examine it thoroughly. It is allowed, (1.) The Spirit of God, (2.) Bears testimony to my spirit, (3.) That I am a child of God. But

I am not to perceive it. Not to perceive what? the first, second, or third particular? Am I not to perceive what is testified; that I am a child of God? Then it is not testified at all. This is saying and unsaying in the same breath. Or am I not to perceive, that it is testified to my spirit? Yea, but I must perceive what passes in my own soul! Or, lastly, am I to perceive that I am a child of God, and that this is testified to my spirit, but not to perceive who it is that testifies? not to know it is the Spirit of God? O Sir, if there be really a man in the world who hath this testimony in himself, can it be supposed that he does not know who it is that testifies; who it is that speaks to his heart?"

7. Instead of giving a direct answer to this, you have recourse to the same supposition with his Lordship of Lichfield and Coventry; namely, that there was once an inward, perceptible testimony of the Spirit, but that it was peculiar to the early ages of the church.

"There are three ways," say you, "in which the Holy Spirit may be said to bear witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (1.) By external, miraculous attestations. (2.) By internal, plainly perceptible whispers." (I must add, "not in words, at least not always, but by some kind of impressions equivalent thereto.") "(3.) By his standing testimony in the holy Scriptures. The Apostles had all these three. Origen and Chrysostom, probably the two latter. But if St. Bernard, several hundred years after, pretended to any other than the third, his neighbours would naturally ask for proof, either that it should be so by Scripture, or that it was so by facts."

Well, then, let us suppose St. Bernard, and one of his neighbours, to be talking together on this subject. On St. Bernard's saying, "The Spirit of God bears witness with my spirit, that I am a child of God;" his neighbour replies, "I suppose he does, but not by an inward, plainly perceptible testimony."—"Yes, by an inward, plainly perceptible testimony. I now have this testimony in myself; I plainly perceive that I am a child of God, and that it is his Spirit who testifies it to my spirit."—"I fear you are somewhat enthusiastically given. I allow God's standing testimony in the Scriptures; but I cannot allow that there is now any such thing as this inward testimony, unless you can either prove by Scripture that it should be so, or by facts that it is

so.”—“Are not these words Scripture: ‘The Spirit itself beareth testimony with our spirit, that we are the children of God?’”—“Yes, but the question is, how they are to be understood; for I deny that they speak of an inward testimony. They speak of the outward, standing testimony of God in the holy Scriptures.”—“You put a manifest force upon the text. You cannot prove that it speaks of any outward testimony at all. But the words immediately preceding prove to a demonstration, that it speaks of an inward testimony: ‘Ye have not received the spirit of bondage unto fear;’ (is not fear an inward thing?) ‘but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!’ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, even the same Spirit which ‘God hath sent forth into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father!’”—“I do not deny that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. But I deny your peculiar interpretation of this text. I deny that this text at all favours an inward, perceptible testimony.”—“The Spirit which God hath sent into my heart, and which now cries in my heart, ‘Abba, Father,’ now beareth testimony with my spirit, that I am a child of God. How can these words be interpreted at all, but of an inward, perceptible testimony?”—“I tell you, of God’s standing testimony in Scripture.”—“This is a palpable violence to the words. They no more speak of Scripture, than of miracles. They manifestly speak of what passes in the heart, the spirit, the inmost soul of a believer, and that only.”

8. But you would say, “Suppose this scripture to prove that it should be so, can you show by facts that it is so?” Not if you take it for granted, that every one who speaks of having this witness in himself is an enthusiast. You are then in no danger of proof from this quarter. You have a short answer to every fact which can be alleged.

But you turn the tables. You say it is I who allow that “many of God’s children do not continue in sound mind and memory.” I allowed, (1.) A man feels the testimony of God’s Spirit, and cannot then deny or doubt his being a child of God. (2.) After a time this testimony is withdrawn: Not from every child of God; many retain the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end. (3.) Then he may doubt whether that testimony was of God, and perhaps, at length, deny that it was; especially if his heart be hardened

by the deceitfulness of his sin. And yet he may be all this time, in every other respect, of "sound memory, as well as understanding." In this respect I allowed he is not; that is, "his understanding is now darkened, and the very traces of that divine work well-nigh erased out of his memory." So I expressly determined the sense wherein I allowed "he does not continue in sound mind and memory." But did I allow that even then he was *non compos mentis*,—a madman, in the common sense? Nothing less: I allowed no more, than, the divine light being withdrawn, his mind was again dark as to the things of God; and that he had forgotten *τη καθαρισμη των παλαι αυτη αμαρτιων*,* (2 Peter i. 9,) well nigh, as if it had never been.

9. But you say, "If variable facts be produced, to-day asserted, to-morrow denied"—Nay, the facts, whether asserted or denied, are still invariable. "But if they be ever doubted or denied, they never were plainly perceptible." I cannot discern any force in that consequence: However, if they are afterward "denied, they are not from Him 'in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'" Neither is this consequence good. Though God is ever the same, man may either assert or deny his works. "The spirit of man, and his fancies or opinions, may vary; but God and his facts cannot." Thus far they can and do: God does not now bear witness as he did before. And this variation of the fact makes way for a variation in the judgment of him who had that witness, but now hath it not. "You may be fully of opinion to-day, that the Scriptures are of God, and doubt of this to-morrow. But what is this to the purpose?" Very much. I am as fully convinced to-day that the Scriptures are of God, as that the sun shines. And this conviction (as every good gift) cometh from the Father of lights. Yet I may doubt of it to-morrow. I may throw away the good gift of God. "But we were speaking not of man's opinions, but of God's facts." We were speaking of both; of man's opinions, or judgment, concerning God's facts. "But could he to whom Christ said, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' ever doubt or deny that Christ said so?" I question not but in process of time he might; particularly if he drew back unto perdition. But however that be, it is no "blasphemous supposition," but a plain, undeniable truth, that the god of

* The purification from his former sins.—EDIT.

this world can obliterate what the God of heaven has strongly imprinted upon the soul; yea, and that he surely will, unless we stir up the gift of God which is in us, by earnestly and continually watching unto prayer.

I presume, you do not deny that a believer, one who has the witness in himself, may make "shipwreck of the faith;" and, consequently, lose the witness (however it be explained) which he once had of his being a child of God. The darkness which then covers his soul again, I ascribe (in part) to the energy of Satan, who *espys*,—"worketh," according to the Apostle, in the children of unbelief, whether they did once believe or no. And has he not much power even on the children of God? to disturb, though not to destroy? to throw fiery darts without number; especially against those who, as yet, are but weak in the faith? to inject doubts and fears? sometimes unbelieving, sometimes even blasphemous thoughts? And how frequently will they be wounded thereby, if they have not put on the whole armour of God!

10. You add: "If we reply, There are enthusiasts in the world, you can keep your temper no longer; and the only answer is, If we perceive not that witness in ourselves, we are ignorant of the whole affair, and doomed to the 'everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.'" I said not so. I can keep my temper (blessed be God) if you call me an hundred enthusiasts; if you affirm, I am ten times more of an enthusiast than that poor Quaker probably was. The sharpest word I said, was, "If a man does not know who it is that testifies with his spirit he is a child of God, he is ignorant of the whole affair." But I felt no anger when I said this. Nor do I now. Though I still think (because you say it yourself) that you are ignorant of this whole affair, of the inward testimony for which I contend. Yet am I far from dooming you to everlasting fire. What you know not, I trust God will reveal unto you. Least of all, was this my "only answer" to your supposition, "that this perceptible testimony is only an imagination, unless I am altogether in a dream." I have given some other answer, and a pretty full one, to the objection; such an one, I think, as the nature of the thing admits, at least as my capacity would allow.

11. I have largely considered, both in the Third Part of the Appeal, and in the latter part of the Second Letter to

Mr. Church, the unreasonableness of the common demand, to prove our doctrine by miracles. I cannot but refer you to those tracts, having neither time nor inclination *actum agere*.* Only I would weigh what you have now advanced, in support of that demand. "If the enthusiast is as confident of his inspiration, as one really inspired is of his, a third person has a right to call for other proof than confident assertions;" that is, for miracles. So you explain yourself in the following sentence. Let us try how this consequence will hold in a particular instance: "The Spirit said unto Paul, Go not into Macedonia." When he related this to his companions, ought they to have replied, "We call for other proof of this than your confident assertion; seeing enthusiasts are as confident of theirs, as you are of this revelation?" If you say, "They had seen his miracles at other times;" I know not that: Perhaps they had, perhaps they had not. But to step a little forward: "If, in the days of Origen and Chrysostom, external miraculous powers were ceased, while internal inspiration still remained," what becomes of your demand here? It is totally excluded; although there were, in those days also, pretenders to what they had not.

And yet there might have been other sufficient reasons for believing the assertion of Origen, Chrysostom, and St. Bernard too, that they had this internal testimony. Such was, besides the holiness of their lives, that great and standing miracle,—their saving so many souls from death, and hiding a multitude of sins.

12. There are at least as many pretenders to the love of God, as there are to the witness of his Spirit. But does this give me a right, if a man asserts, he loves God, to demand his proving that assertion by miracles? Not so; but by their fruits I shall know a real and a pretended love of God. And in the same manner may I know him that has the witness of God's love, from an enthusiastic pretender to it. But if a man disclaims it, he sets himself out of the question. It is beyond dispute that he has it not.

Neither do I want miracles in order to determine my judgment with regard to scriptures variously interpreted. I would not say, in this case, "Show me a sign;" but, "Bring

* To do the same thing repeatedly.—EDIT.

forth your strong reasons ;” and according to these, weighed in an even, impartial scale, would I incline to one side or the other.

13. From the beginning of our correspondence, I did not expect you to alter your judgment touching those points wherein we differed. But I was willing (and am so still) to hear and consider whatever you should advance concerning them ; and so much the rather, because in the greatest points we do agree already ; and in the smaller we can bear with each other, and speak what we apprehend to be the truth in love. Let us bless God for this, and press on to the mark. It cannot be long before we shall be quite of one mind ; before the veil of flesh shall drop off, and we shall both see pure light, in the unclouded face of God.

XLIII.—*To the Same.*

SIR,

DUBLIN, *March 22, 1747-8.*

I REJOICE to find that in some points we come nearer each other, and that we can bear with each other where we do not. I entirely agree that hell was designed only for stubborn, impenitent sinners, and, consequently, that it would be absurd to “threaten damnation to any, merely for differing from me in speculations.” But it is an absurdity which I have nothing to do with ; for it never yet entered into my thoughts.

2. I rejoice likewise in your allowing that my “speculations, though false, yea, and leading to a deviation from order, may yet possibly be neither wilful nor sinful ;” and much more in that which follows : “I question not but God’s mercy may both forgive and reward,” even that zeal which is not according to knowledge.

3. Yet “such deviation,” you think, “may open a door to much disorder and error.” I grant it may ; but I still insist, (1.) That accidental ill consequences may flow from a good thing. (2.) That the good consequences, in the present case, overbalance the evil beyond all possible degrees of comparison. The same I believe of Mr. Whitefield’s public preaching, (which was not the consequence, but the cause, of mine,) whose doctrine in general (though he is mistaken in some points) I believe to be the truth of the Gospel.

4. I never did censure the whole body of Clergy ; and God forbid that I ever should. I do not willingly censure