

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

why, even the grossly immoral. But you advise to "complain of these to the Bishop of the diocese." In what way? "Be so public spirited as to present them." Much may be said on that question. I should ask, (1.) Have I a right to present them? I apprehend not. The Churchwardens of each parish are to do this; which they will hardly do, at my instance. (2.) If I could do it myself, the presenting them to the Court is not presenting them to the Bishop: The Bishop, you cannot but know, has no more authority in what is called the Bishop's Court, than the Pope of Rome. (3.) I cannot present, suppose, thirty persons in as many counties, to the Lay Chancellors or Officials, (men whom I apprehend to have just as much authority from Scripture to administer the sacraments, as to try ecclesiastical causes,) without such an expense both of labour, and money, and time, as I am by no means able to sustain. And what would be the fruit, if I could sustain it? if I was the informer-general against the immoral Clergy of England? O Sir, can you imagine, or dare you say, that I should "have the thanks of the Bishops, and of all good men, both Clergy and laity?" If you allow only those to be good men who would thank me for this, I fear you would not find seven thousand good men in all our Israel.

5. But you have been "assured there are proofs about to be produced of very shocking things among us also." It is very possible you may. And, to say the truth, I expected such things long ago. In such a body of people, must there not be some hypocrites, and some who did for a time serve God in sincerity, and yet afterwards turn back from the holy commandment once delivered to them? I am amazed there have been so few instances of this, and look for more every day. The melancholy case of that unhappy man, Mr. Hall, I do not rank among these; for he had renounced us long ago, and that over and over, both by word and writing. And though he called upon me once or twice a year, and lately made some little overtures of friendship, yet I have it under his own hand, he could have no fellowship with us, because we would not leave the Church. But *quia intellexi minus, protrusit foras*.* To make it quite plain and clear how close a connexion there was between him and me, when

* But, because I seemed reluctant to entertain his views, he expelled me from his dwelling.—EDIT.

I lately called on his poor wife at Salisbury, he fairly turned me out of doors, and my sister after me.

6. My father did not die unacquainted with the faith of the Gospel, of the primitive Christians, or of our first Reformers; the same which, by the grace of God, I preach, and which is just as new as Christianity. What he experienced before, I know not; but I know that during his last illness, which continued eight months, he enjoyed a clear sense of his acceptance with God. I heard him express it more than once, although at that time I understood him not. "The inward witness, son, the inward witness," said he to me, "that is the proof, the strongest proof, of Christianity." And when I asked him, (the time of his change drawing nigh,) "Sir, are you in much pain?" he answered aloud with a smile, "God does chasten me with pain, yea, all my bones with strong pain; but I thank Him for all, I bless Him for all, I love Him for all!" I think the last words he spoke, when I had just commended his soul to God, were, "Now you have done all." And with the same serene, cheerful countenance he fell asleep, without one struggle, or sigh, or groan. I cannot therefore doubt but the Spirit of God bore an inward witness with his spirit, that he was a child of God.

7. That "God blesses a doctrine preached (new or old) to the saving of souls from death, does not prove that every circumstance of it is true; for a Predestinarian Preacher may save souls." But it undoubtedly proves, that the main of what is preached is the truth as it is in Jesus; for it is only the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God unto salvation. Human wisdom, as human laws, may restrain from outward sin; but they cannot avail to the saving of the soul. If God gives this blessing to what is preached, it is a sufficient "proof of His approbation." But I will not contend about words, or, when his blessing is allowed, dispute whether it has His approbation or not.

8. But to argue on your own supposition: You say, "It only shows, that novelty, which has a natural tendency to awakening, may, when God pleases, have an efficacious tendency to amending." Well, then, if the novelty of an indifferent circumstance, such as place, has a natural tendency to awakening, surely we may use it according to its natural tendency, in order to awaken those that sleep in sin! And

if God has, in fact, been pleased to use it beyond its natural tendency, to make it efficacious for amending as well as awakening, ought we not to acquiesce, yea, and rejoice therein?

9. But are sinners amended? Are they saved from their sins? Are they truly converted to God? Here is, what always must be, the main question. That many are in some sort converted, is owned. But to what are they converted? "to the belief of such proofless, incredible stuff as transubstantiation? or to the Popish severities of flesh-fasting, celibacies, and other monkeries?" Not so. If they are converted at all, they are converted from all manner of wickedness, "to a sober, righteous, and godly life." Such an uniform practice is true outward holiness. And wherever this is undeniably found, we ought to believe there is holiness of heart; seeing the tree is known by its fruits.

10. That "the conversion of sinners to this holiness is no miracle at all," is new doctrine indeed! So new to me, that I never heard it before, either among Protestants or Papists. I think a miracle is a work of omnipotence, wrought by the supernatural power of God. Now, if the conversion of sinners to holiness is not such a work, I cannot tell what is. I apprehend our Lord accounts it a greater work than giving sight to the blind, yea, or raising the dead; for it was after he had raised Lazarus from the dead, that he told his Apostles, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also. And greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father." Greater outward works they could not do. It remains, therefore, that we understand those solemn words, of converting souls to God; which is indeed a greater work than any that can be wrought on the body.

11. I am glad you do "not demand miracles in proof of doctrines." Thus far, then, we are agreed. But you demand them, (1.) "As things to which I lay claim;" and in order to show that claim cannot be supported. (2.) As necessary to give me "a right to be implicitly believed." And, (3.) To justify my "assuming the Apostolate of England."

If this be all, your demand must soon fall to the ground, since the whole foundation sinks beneath it. For, (1.) I lay no claim (in your sense) to miracles; for the clearing of which, suffer me to refer you once more (that I may not

be surfeited with *crambe decies repetita**) to the Second Letter to Mr. Church. (2.) I claim no implicit faith: I neither pay it to, nor expect it from, any man living. (3.) I no otherwise assume the Apostolate of England, (if you choose to use the phrase,) than I assume the Apostolate of all Europe, or, rather, of all the world; that is, in plain terms, wherever I see one or a thousand men running into hell, be it in England, Ireland, or France, yea, in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America, I will stop them if I can: As a Minister of Christ, I will beseech them, in His name, to turn back, and be reconciled to God. Were I to do otherwise, were I to let any soul drop into the pit, whom I might have saved from everlasting burnings, I am not satisfied God would accept my plea, "Lord, he was not of my parish."

12. If a single parish takes up your whole time and care, and you spend and are spent upon it, well. And yet I will be bold to say, that no blessing from God will accompany your ministry, but the drunkard will be a drunkard still, (and so the covetous, the brawler, the adulterer,) unless you both believe and teach, what you love to call, my "new notions of inspiration:" I mean as to the substance, not the particular manner of explication. You will all the day long stretch out your hands in vain, unless you teach them to pray, that the Spirit of God may inwardly witness with their spirits, that they are the children of God. I apprehend you are the person that "wriggle on this head," because the argument pinches: You appear to me to twist and wind to and fro, because I "distinguish away," not my doctrines, but your objections;—unravelling the fallacies, showing what part is false, and what part true, but nothing to the purpose. Since you move it again, I will resume the point once more. You will pardon me if I speak home, that it may be seen which of us two it is, that has hitherto given the "evasive answers."

13. You say, "Notwithstanding all your pains to distort that text, for anything which has yet been said to the contrary, it may be understood of the Spirit's witness by miracles, by prophecy, or by the imperceptibly wrought assurances of the Holy Ghost." This (unless it gives up the

* Saying the same things ten times over.—EDIT.

whole cause, as indeed it must, if it does not imply a contradiction; seeing imperceptible assurance is no assurance at all) is neither an evasive nor an unequivocal answer. It is just no answer at all. Instead of refuting my arguments, you reply, "You distort the text. *Iipse dixi.*"

"The Quakers maintain divine illapses, and sensible communications always; you only sometimes." If you speak to the purpose, if you mean the inward witness of God's Spirit, I maintain it always as well as they.

"The Methodist writings abound with intimations of divine communications, prophetic whispers, and special guidances." Perhaps so; but that is another question. We are now speaking of the inward witness of the Spirit.

14. "They teach the notification of justification to be as perceptible as the sun at noon-day." Now you come to the point, and I allow the charge. From the beginning of our correspondence to this day, I have, without any shifting or evasion at all, maintained flatly and plainly: (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 this testimony was of God; and perhaps at length deny that it was.

There is no shadow of contradiction between this and the case of H. R. For, (1.) She felt the testimony of God's Spirit, and could not then deny or doubt her being a child of God. (2.) After a time this testimony was withdrawn. (3.) Then she doubted whether it was of God. Observe: She never forgot or denied that she had such a testimony; but she then doubted whether it was of God.

But you have still more to remark upon this head: So I attend you step by step.

15. "The instances produced" (it should be "instance," for you cite but one) "in support of these high claims, instead of supporting, utterly subvert them. Thus H. R. had her justification notified; and yet she denied that her sins were forgiven." You should say, She doubted of it, after a time, when the testimony of God's Spirit was withdrawn. "Now, either this notification was not so distinct as is pretended, or, if distinct, was notified by one of suspected credit, whom she could not believe. Or if it was both

distinct and credible, she was not of sound understanding if she disbelieved it, nor of sound memory if she" (afterwards, it should be) "doubted or denied that she had ever received such a message."

You say, (1.) "Either that notification was not so distinct." It was so distinct that she could not then doubt. "Or, (2.) Was notified to her by one of suspected credit, whom she could not believe." Yes, she then believed, and knew it was the voice of God. "Or, (3.) She was not of sound understanding, if she disbelieved it." When she disbelieved it, she was not. For as the serpent deceived Eve, so he then deceived her, *φθειρων το νοημα αυτης*.*

"But could she possibly deny a plain matter of fact?" You add, as if I have said so, "Yes, in process of time she might, particularly if she drew back to perdition;" and then subjoin, "But what is this evasive answer to the case of H. R.?" I think, nothing at all. I never applied it to her case. She never denied her having had such a testimony. But after a time she doubted (as I said before) whether that testimony was true.

16. I presume, Eve in paradise was at least equal in understanding with any of her posterity. Now, unto her God said, "In the day that thou eatest of the tree of knowledge thou shalt surely die." And doubtless "this notification was as distinct and perceptible to her as the sun at noon-day." Yet after a time (perhaps only a few days) she utterly disbelieved it.

You exclaim, "Absurd! Impossible! There could be no such thing; as I shall prove immediately."

"Either this notification was not so distinct as is pretended, or, if distinct, was notified by one of suspected credit, whom she could not believe. Or else, if it was both distinct and credible, she was not of sound understanding if she disbelieved it, nor of sound memory if she doubted of it." Therefore the whole story is absurd, and a self-inconsistent (not a cunningly-devised) fable.

Is not the plain answer this? This notification was as distinct as [is] pretended; and it was not notified by one of suspected credit, whom she did then firmly believe. But afterwards Satan deceived her by his subtlety, *φθειρων το*

* See in the next page Mr. Wealey's translation of this allusion to 2 Cor. xi. 3.—EDIT.

νοημα αυτης,—“corrupting, spoiling, destroying, the soundness of her understanding,” and of her memory too; and then she disbelieved God, and believed him who said, “Ye shall not surely die.” How much more is he able, by the same subtlety, to deceive any of the fallen children of men!

17. What follows you did not design for argument, but wit. “I cannot help thinking that Paul, with all his infirmities, might more reasonably be looked upon as an inspired Prophet than Mr. Wesley, though arrived, in his own imagination, to a sinless perfection.” I never told you so, nor any one else. I no more imagine that I have already attained, that I already love God with all my heart, soul, and strength, than that I am in the third heavens.

But you make me abundant amends for this by your charitable belief, that though I may now imagine things that are not, and be mistaken in many points, yet He who remembers I am but dust, will at last “forgive and reward me.” It is enough: The time of error and sin is short; for eternity is at hand.

Strangers and pilgrims here below,
This earth, we know, is not our place;
And hasten through the vale of woe,
And, restless to behold thy face,
Swift to our heavenly country move,
Our everlasting home above.

XLIV.—*To his Brother Charles.*

SAVANNAH, *April 20, 1736.*

I STILL extremely pity poor Mrs. Hawkins; but what can I do more, till God show me who it is that continually exasperates her against me? Then I may perhaps be of some service to her. There is surely some one who does not play us fair; but I marvel not at the matter. He that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there is that is mightier than they. Yet a little while, and God will declare who is sincere. Tarry thou the Lord's leisure and be strong, and he shall comfort thy heart.

XLV.—*To the Same.*

DEAR BROTHER,

BRISTOL, *June 23, 1739.*

MY answer to them which trouble me is this: God commands me to do good unto all men; to instruct the