

L E T T E R I I I .

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L E T T E R I I I .

DEAR SIR,

I Sit down to write now with a view to make some compensation for the prolixity of my last letter, by the brevity of this. Having freely given you my thoughts upon the NATURE and GROUNDS of Faith, I now proceed to make a few remarks respecting its EFFECTS. Faith is productive of effects. The effects of faith generally correspond to the ideas we form of the propositions we believe.

Man is a complex being. His constituent parts are body and soul. His body is a most curious piece of workmanship, and the soul that animates it possesses astonishing powers.

It has the power of receiving ideas. It is capable of being affected with love and hatred, fear and hope, joy and sorrow. . . . It has ability to chuse, or refuse objects that are presented to the mind. These powers of the soul, for the sake of distinction, we denominate the understanding, affections, and will.

The understanding, affections, and will, are not parts of the soul, strictly speaking; but the soul itself which thinks, loves, hates, chuses. . . . The soul is one simple principle of operation; and all its operations depend one upon another.

All moral actions originate in the will—the will is influenced by the affections—and the affections are excited

cited by the understanding, or the views we have of things. We are influenced in our conduct by the force of motives; which, being presented to the mind, affect the passions, and govern the will. Man may be compared to a fine piece of curious mechanism, all the wheels of which are so closely connected, and so admirably adjusted, that if one move, all the rest move with it. The understanding is the main spring, and our ideas are its elasticity. Every idea produces an effect. To say that its influence may be prevented by the intervention of some other object, is equal to saying, that when an idea is banished from the mind it loses its influence; which is what I readily acknowledge. If you take away the weights from a clock, or

the elastic power of the main-spring of a watch, all their respective wheels will instantly stop of course.

Our ideas affect the passions, the will, and the conduct, whether they spring from sensation, reflection, or testimony.

As men are furnished with understanding and will, from whence their actions flow, they are properly moral agents, and therefore accountable to the God that formed them, for the use they make of their faculties.

We observed that faith not only produceth effects, but such kind of effects as correspond to the ideas we form of the reports we credit. This may be said of all ideas. A miser has an idea of wealth as his
supreme

supreme good. This idea produces an excessive love of money, which amounts to a kind of adoration. This love of money influences his will to chuse wealth for the principal object of his pursuit. His will guides his actions. He rises early, and sits up late. He guards against indolence, prodigality, sensuality, and whatever opposes his ruling passion *AVARICE*. He is far from being generous, or even strictly just. He parts with gold, as with his God. Hence the word of God calls covetousness idolatry* If by fire, pestilence, or any dire calamity, he is deprived of his wealth, he is ready to exclaim with Micah, *Ye have taken away my gods and what have I more†?*

AN

* Col. iii. 5. † Judges xviii. 24.

An ambitious man has an idea of fame as his supreme good; and this he pursues with the greatest ardor. Every thing must give way to ambition, which is his leading passion. Whatever appears adapted to gratify his immoderate love of fame, he adopts. Means are indifferent in themselves. If vice seem calculated to obtain his end, he will be vicious. If virtue appear the most probable mean, he will appear in the garb of virtue. *Satan himself is transf- into an angel of light**.

Apply these remarks to the man of pleasure, to the scholar, and to the true Christian; and I think you will perceive that every thing depends upon our views of things.

With

* 2 Cor. xi. 14:

With respect to faith particularly, we may observe that these observations hold good. Some propositions are indeed indifferent; they are nothing to us, whether they are true or false, and consequently they leave the mind in a state of indifference respecting them. But here is an agreement between the state of the mind, and the nature of the reports we credit. The far greater part of common reports are of this kind, indifferent to us.

But some propositions particularly interest us; and they produce in the mind pleasure or pain, according to their respective natures. If you are informed of the death of a valuable friend, or an affectionate relative, and have reason to believe the in-formation

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formation true, you will be filled with painful sensations, your heart will be wounded with grief, and every thing around you will seem to wear a gloomy aspect*. If, on the contrary, you are told of the recovery of a beloved friend, who was dangerously ill, and believed the report, your mind will be exhilarated with joy†.

When we receive any delightful or melancholy intelligence, our joys or sorrows are in proportion to the degrees of evidence, and our natural sensibility or stoicism.

Some seem so peculiarly formed as to be deeply affected with the most trifling occurrences. Trifles

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* Job i. 20. † Gen. xlv. 27, 28.

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give them exquisite pain, or afford them inexpressible joy; whilst others hear of the most interesting or alarming events, without feeling any emotions of joy or sorrow.

When we speak of interesting propositions, we should recollect that what appears important to one, may not appear important, or not equally important, to another. Men may believe the same propositions, and yet be differently affected, because their ideas of them differ. Or, if they have the same ideas of some particular propositions they believe, they may not operate exactly alike, if their views of other things are very different. Great allowance is to be made for the different characters of men, their several connexions in life,

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life, the circumstances that attend
them in providence, and their vari-
ous sentiments on different subjects.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Your sincere friend,

L E T T E R I V.

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