AN

EXPOSITION,

WITH

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS,

OF THE

THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

Completed by Mr. T. Reynolds.

CHRISTIAN communion is exerted and cherished by letter. Christians are to be commended in the practical proof of their professed subjection to the gospel of Christ. The animating and countenancing of generous and public-spirited persons, is doing good to many.—To this end, the apostle sends this encouraging epistle to his friend Gaius, in which also he complains of the quite opposite spirit and practice of a certain minister, and confirms the good report concerning another more worthy to be imitated.

III. JOHN.

In this epistle the apostle congratulates Gaius upon the prosperity of his soul; (v. 1, 2.) upon the fame he had among good Christians; (v. 3, 4.) and upon his charity and hospitality to the servants of Christ, v. 3, 6. He complains of contemptuous treatment by an ambitious Diotrephes, v. 9, 10. Recommends Demetrius, v. 12. And hopes to visit Gaius shortly, v. 13, 14.

1. THE elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

2. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

Here we see, 1. The sacred penman who writes and sends the letter; not here indeed notified by his name, but a more general character—The elder; he that is so by years and by office: honour and deference are due to both. Some have questioned whether this were John the apostle or no: but his style and spirit seem to shine therein. They that are beloved of Christ, will love the brethren for his sake. Gaius could not question from whom the letter came. The apostle might have assumed many more illustrious characters, but it becomes not Christ's ministers to affect swelling pompous titles. He almost himself with the more ordinary pastors of the church, while he styles himself—The elder. Or, possibly, most of the extraordinary ministers, the apostles, were now dead, and this holy survivor would countenance the continued standing ministry, by assuming the more common title—The elder. The elders I exhort, who are also an elder, 1 Pet. 5. 1.

2. The person saluted and honoured by the letter; the former was directed to an elect lady, this to a choice gentleman; such are worthy of esteem and value: he is notified, (1.) By his name, Gaius. We read of several of that name, particularly of one whom the apostle Paul baptised at Corinth, who possibly might be also the apostle's host and kind entertainer there; (Rom. 16. 23.) if this be not he, it is his brother in name, estate, and disposition. Then, (2.) By the kind expressions of the apostle to him—the well-beloved, and whom I love in the truth. Love expressed is wont to kindle love. Here seems to be either the sincerity of the apostle's love, or the religion of it; the sincerity of it—whom I love in truth, whom I truly cordially love; the religion of it—whom I love in the truth, for the truth's sake, as abiding and walking in the truth, as it is in Jesus. To love our friends for the truth's sake, is true love, religious gospel-love.

3. The salutation or greeting; containing a prayer, introduced by an affectionate compellation—Beloved, thou beloved one in Christ. The minister who would gain love, must shew it himself. Here is, (1.) The apostle's good opinion of his friend, that his soul prospered. There is such a thing as soul-prosperity—the greatest blessing on this side heaven; this supposes regeneration, and an inward fund of spiritual life; this stock is increasing, and while spiritual treasures are advancing, the soul is in a fair way to the kingdom of glory. (2.) His good wish for his friend, that his body may prosper and be in health as well as his soul. Grace and health are two rich companions; grace will improve health, health will employ grace; it frequently falls out that a rich soul is lodged in a crazy body; grace must be exercised in submission to such a dispensation; but we may well wish and pray that they who have prosperous souls, may have healthful bodies too; there grace will shine in a larger sphere of activity.

3. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.
thou dost faithfully whatsoever thou dost to the brethren, and to strangers; 6. Who have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: 7. Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. 8. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpersto the truth.

In these verses we have, 1. The good report that the apostle had received concerning this friend of his; The brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, (v. 3.) who have borne witness of thy charity before the church, v. 6. Where we may see, (1.) The testimony or thing testified concerning Galus—the truth that was in him; the reality of his faith, the sincerity of his religion, and devotedness to God; and this evinced by his charity, which includes his love to the brethren, kindness to the poor, hospitality to Christian strangers, and readiness to accommodate them for the service of the gospel. Faith should work by love; it gives a lustre in and by the offices of love, and induces others to commend its integrity. (2.) The witnesses—brethren that came and testified of his true state. A good report is due from those who have received good; though a good name is but a small reward for costly service, yet it is better than precious ointment, and will not be refused by the ingenuous and religious. (3.) The auditory, or judicator by which the report and testimony were given—before the church; this seems to be the church at which the apostle now resided; what church that was, we are not sure; what occasion they had thus to testify his faith and love before the church, we cannot tell; possibly out of the fulness of the heart the mouth spake; they could not but testify what they found and felt; possibly, they would engage the church's prayer for the continued life and usefulness of such a patron, that he might prosper and be in health as his soul prospered.

2. The report the apostle himself gives of him, introduced by an endearing appellation again; Beloved, thou dost faithfully whatsoever thou dost to the brethren, and to strangers, v. 5. (1.) He was hospitable, good to the brethren, even to strangers; it was enough to recommend them to Galus's house, that they belonged to Christ; or he was good to the brethren of the same church with himself, and to those who came from far; all of the household of faith were welcome to him. (2.) He seems to have been of a catholic spirit; he could overlook the petty differences among serious Christians, and be communicative to all who bore the image and did the work of Christ. And, (3.) He was conscientious in what he did; Thy dost faithfully (thou makest faithful work of) whatsoever thou dost; thou dost it as a faithful servant; and from the Lord Christ ministereth, who worketh the reward of the inheritance. Such faithful souls can hear their own praises without being puffed up; the commendation of what is good in us, is designed, not for our pride, but for our encouragement to continue therein, and should be accordingly improved.

3. The apostle's joy therein, in the good report itself, and the good ground of it; I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of thy charity, &c. we have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth, in the precepts of the Christian religion. The best evidence of our having the truth, is, our walking in the truth. Good men will greatly rejoice in the soul-prosperity of others; and they are glad to hear of the grace and goodness of others; They glorified God in me. Love envieth not, but rejoiceth in the good name of other folks. As it is joy to good parents, it will be joy to good ministers to see their children evidence their truth in religion, and adorn their profession.

4. The direction the apostle gives his friend concerning further treatment of the brethren that were with him; whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well. It seems to have been customary in these days of love, to attend travelling ministers and Christians, at least some part of their road, 1 Cor. 16. 8. It is a kindness to the minister; to be good friends, and a pleasure to travellers, to meet with suitable company; this is a work that may be done after a godly sort, in a manner worthy of God, suitable to the deference and relation we bear to God. Christians should consider not only what they must do, but what they may do; what they may most honourably and landably do: the liberal mind deviseth liberal, generous things. Christians should do even the common offices of charity and good-will, after a godly sort, as serving God therein, and designing his glory. Then, 5. The reasons of this directed conduct; these are two: (1.) Because that for his name's sake these brethren went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. It appears thus that these were ministerial brethren; that they went forth to preach the gospel and propagate Christianity; possibly, they might be sent out by this apostle himself; they went forth to continue the Gentiles; this is a more excellent sort, they went forth for God and his name's sake; this is the minister's highest end, and should be his principal spring and motive, to gather and to build up a people for his name; they went forth also to carry a free gospel about with them; to make it unexpensive where they came; taking nothing of the Gentiles; these were worthy of double honour. There are those who are not called to preach the gospel themselves, who yet may much contribute to the progress of it. The gospel should be made without charge to those to whom it is first preached; they who know it not, cannot be expected to value it; the churches and Christian patriots ought to concur to support the propagation of holy religion in the Pagan countries; public spirits should concur according to their several capacities; they who are freely communicative of Christ's name, by ministers, are so by those who are communicative of their purses.

(2.) We ought therefore to receive such, that we may be fellow-helpersto the truth, to true religion. The institution of Christ is the true religion, it has been attested by God; that they are true in it and true to it, will earnestly desire, and pray for, and contribute to, its propagation in the world; many ways may the truth be befriended and assisted; they who cannot themselves do good, will, after a godly sort, accompany, help, and countenance those who do.

9. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them, receiveth us not. 10. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. 11. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth that, is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.
III. JOHN.

The evidence of our Filial happy relation to God. (2.)

To the Reader: Follow not that which is evil. He that doeth evil (with bent of mind pursues it), hath not seen God, is not duly sensible of his holy nature and will. Evil-workers vainly pretend or boast an acquaintance with God.

12. Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record, and ye know that our record is true. 13. I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: 14. But I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

Here we see, 1. The character of another person, one Demetrius; not much known otherwise. But here his name will live. A name in the gospel a fame in the churches, is better than that of sons and daughters. His character was his commendation. His commendation was, (1.) General; Demetrius has a good report of all men. Few are well spoken of by all; and sometimes it is ill to be so. But universal integrity and goodness are the way to card and sometimes they win the universal applause. (2.) Deserved and well founded; And of the truth itself, v. 12. Some have a good report, but not of the truth itself. Happy they whose spirit and conduct commend them before God and men. (3.) Confirmed by the apostle's and his friends' testimony; Yea, and we also bear record; and that with an appeal to Gaius's own knowledge. And ye (you and your friends) know that our record is true. Probably, this Demetrius was known to the church where the apostle now resided, and to that where Gaius was. It is good to be well known, or known for good. We must be ready to bear our testimony to those who are good: it is a debt to virtue and goodness. It is well for those who are commended, when they may see that their friends can appeal to the consciences of those who know them most. 2. The character of a personal letter; I write not to you, I write to thee. (1.) The referring of some things to personal interview; I have many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen, but I trust I shall shortly see thee, v. 13, 14. Many things may be more proper for immediate communication, than for letter. A little personal conference may spare the time, trouble, and charge, of many letters; and good Christians may well be glad to see one another. (2.) The benediction; Peace be to you; all felicity attend you. They that are good and happy themselves, wish others so too. (3.) The public salutation sent to Gaius; Our friends salute thee. A friend to the propagation of religion deserves a common remembrance. And those pious persons shew their friendship to religion as well as to Gaius. (4.) The apostle's particular salutation of the Christians in Gaius's church or vicinity; Greet the friends by name. I doubt they were not very many; yet we may be so personally saluted. But we must learn humility as well as love. The lowest in the church of Christ should be greeted. And they may well salute and greet one another on earth, who hope to live together in heaven. And the apostle who had lain in Christ's bosom, lays Christ's friends in his heart.