

Preface to John Norton's
The Orthodox Evangelist.

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To the Judicious Christian Reader.

THE Penning and Reading of godly Books, is a singular improvement of the Communion of Saints: as whereby we enjoy sweet and gracious conference with the Saints, though unknown to us, though absent in place, and distant in time (yea many ages before us) and so partake in the Communion of their most precious gifts, as if they were present with us, or as if we had been of long acquainted with them, which maketh me sometimes to wish, that though I cannot nor dare not say, that Spiritual Gifts are buried, when they are only dispensed in a Pulpit (for in a Pulpit they are set upon a Candlestick, and give light to all that are in the House of this or that particular Church:) yet where God giveth an eminent measure of light, set to shine forth to a Nation, or to a world of Churches: That such Gifts might not be confined to a Pulpit; but as clusters of ripe Grapes passing under the press, are fit to be transported to all Nations; So such Gifts and Labours passing under the Press, may be fitly Communicated to all Churches, it is indeed a true word which the word of truth hath spoken (Eccles. 12:12.) Of making many books there is no end and much reading is a weariness to the flesh. But yet, some books there be, of which I may say, as Ferne-lius, and other Physicians speak of their Pills; There are *Pillulæ sine quibus, that is, sine quibus esse nolo;* so there be some *libelli sine quibus, some books sine quibus esse nolo.* And this is one of them, without which I would neither be my self, nor wish thee to be.

Though most books be accommodated to Popular capacity (And they do most good extensively;) yet there

had need to be some, which speak accurately, that they who apply their Sermons and writings to popular capacity; may still keep within the compass of exact Truth: and they do most good intensively. The Holy Ghost by Paul giveth the People of God an holy warning. See that ye walk circumspectly; or (as the word is) exactly, Ephes. 5:15. Now if the Rule of a Christian life be, walk exactly, Surely the Rule of a Scribe taught to the Kingdom of God, and gifted for it, is, write exactly.

There be some of good judgement; who interpret the four Creatures (in Revel. 4:7.) to hold forth the four sorts of Officers in the Church: The Lyon (for his Courage and Power) the Ruling Elder: The Ox (for his patience and labour in treading out the Corn) the Pastor: The Man (for his Prudence in ordering the human outward affairs of the Church) the Deacon: The Eagle (for his soaring aloft, and quick insight into remote, and hidden things) the Teacher. How well therefore doth it become this our Reverend Brother, the Teacher of an intelligent people (the Church at Ipswich) to launch forth into the deep, (as Christ biddeth his Disciples, Luk. 5:4.) To spy out and discover the secret and abstruse mysteries of the Kingdom of God?

Moreover that which adorneth the exactness of the matter of this discourse, is, Pithy Brevity, compacting as many things as words together; that as it was the constant desire and affectation, and expression of Dr Preston, to live long in a little time; So it appeareth to be the serious care and endeavour of this our beloved Brother, to speak much in few words. The Schoolmen (though they be none of the soundest Divines) yet of late years, have crept (for a time) into more cre-

dit amongst Schools, then the most judicious and Orthodox of our best new writers (Luther, Calvin, Mar-

tyr, Bucer, and the rest:) and their books were much more vendible, and at a far greater price: But what or wherein lay their pre-eminence? Not in the light of Divine Grace (whereof most of them were wholly destitute) nor in their skill in Tongues and Polite Literature, wherein they were Barbarians:) nor in their deeper insight into the holy Scriptures (in which they were far less conversant, then in Peter Lumbard, and Aristotle:) but in their rational disputes, with distinct Solidity and Succinct brevity. But in the mean time they corrupted the whole body of Divinity, with many curious and unprofitable questions, with many Philosophical (falsely so called) and vain Notions, and with many subtile devices, to uphold the Church of Rome, in their then prevailing Antichristian Apostacy. What was unsound and corrupt in the Schoolmen, our Brother (by the guidance of Christ) hath faithfully and Religiously avoided: what was commendable and desirable, he hath (through grace) not so much imitated as exceeded: Opening the principal heads of Divinity, with more then rational evidence, even with Scripture light: and all with such distinct Solidity, as may both clear the understanding, and satisfy the Judgment, yea and by grace establish the faith of the diligent Reader: and that with such Succinct Brevity, as avoideth at once both Perplexity, and obscurity together, Amongst other disputes which have much exercised the Schoolmen of old, and still do busy the Dominicans and Jesuits, concerning the concurrence of Grace, and Free-will therein, the Lord hath led this our Brother with a strong hand to search out, and de-

dare, the abstruse mysteries thereof, with such holy Dexterity, as that if the dissenting parties were as willing to hearken to the Oracles of God speaking in the Scriptures, and opened in this book, as the Romanists have often appealed to the Pope (and all in vain) for the compounding of this controversy, The Doctrines of Grace would be much more clearly delivered, and ge-

nerally accepted, with more peace and truth, not only amongst them, but amongst Protestants also; yea and even such Protestants as excel in holiness and knowledge, and yet seem (and but seem) to vary (though Logically, yet not Theologically) in some doctrines of Grace, may (through grace) either judge and speak all one thing, or at least condescend: placide ferre contrasentientes, mildly to bear with difference of judgement in such a case.

And as for such Protestants as follow Bellarmine and Fevardentius in extenuating the bitterness of the Soul-sufferings of Christ from any sense of spiritual Desertions (as if such pangs were incompatible to his pure and innocent Nature and Life) I trust the Lord will give them to discern by another book of this Author (treating purposely of that Argument) the more bitter the cup was which he drank up for us, the deeper was the guilt of our sin, and the greater was the measure of his Love towards us. And unless the whole guilt of our sins be imputed to him, and his perfect obedience to the Law be imputed to us, we shall fall short, both of the matter and form of our justification.

Now the God of all Grace, and Peace, and Truth, bless these gracious Endeavours of his Servant to the free passage of his Truth and peace in the hearts and Judgments. of his Churches and People through our Lord Jesus.

Boston, 20. Sept. 1652.

JOHN COTTON.