

MS Malefactors¹

MS Malefactors is a collection of looseleaf sheets, placed in a foolscap folder, on the outside of which is inscribed “Malefactors.” It contains eight hymns, growing out of Charles Wesley’s ministry with prisoners. For further examples of such hymns, including the published location of one of the hymns in this set (shown in [blue font](#) in the Table of contents), see *Prayers for Condemned Malefactors* (1785). The other seven hymns remained unpublished at Wesley’s death. Most of the hymns likely date from the last decade of Wesley’s life. Only the first nine pages are numbered in the original set.

MS Malefactors is part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre, accession number MA 1977/583/7 (Charles Wesley Notebooks Box 4). The transcription below is provided with permission of the Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under the editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox, and Dr. Timothy Underhill consulting on the shorthand. Last updated: 1 August 2010.

Table of Contents

First. Hymn for a condemned Malefactor	1–2
II. Prayer for Condemned Malefactors	3–5
III. For condemned Malefactors	6–7
III. The Prayer of Condemned Malefactors—May 10, 1785	8–9
Another <i>Prayers for Condemned Malefactors</i> (1785), 6	10
For Condemned Mal[efacto]rs	11
[blank, except for shorthand]	12
For Condemned Malefactors	13–14
For a Condemned Malefactor	15–16

First.
Hymn for a condemned
Malefactor.²

- [1.] Suffer'd a few [sad³] hours to live,
Before I my deserts receive,
 And justice satisfy,
Unless my stubborn heart relent,
Dying, unless I first repent,
 I must for ever die.⁴
2. Yet careless on the brink of hell,
I no remorse, or sorrow feel,
 No fear or guilty shame;
Stupid to my own place I go
To⁵ lift my haggard eyes below
 In that tormenting flame.⁶
3. Devils my parting soul surround,
To plunge me in the gulph profound,
 The bottomless abyss,
And the great God's eternal Son
A Prince and Saviour on his⁷ throne,
 My lost condition sees.

²Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:317–18.

³Not present in original; inserted from shorthand version on p. 12 to maintain metre.

⁴There is a shorthand draft of this stanza on p. 12 below.

⁵Ori., “~~And~~.”

⁶There is a shorthand draft of this stanza on p. 12 below.

⁷Ori., “~~of the~~.”

4. He sees, and if he pities too,
He can incarnate fiends subdue
 The fiends of Adam's race,
He surely can show forth on me
Whose all is sin and misery,
 Th' omnipotence of grace.
5. His heart, constrain'd by love divine,
To touch, and turn, and soften mine
 Was ready long ago:
And if his love *my* heart constrain,
I, after death may live again,
 And my Redeemer know.
6. Here then I at his footstool lie,
To catch the influence of his eye,
 His blessing to partake,
If in himself a Cause he find
To save the basest⁸ of mankind
 For his own mercy sake.

⁸Ori., "vilest."

II.
Prayer
for Condemned Malefactors.⁹

- [1.] And must I sink among the dead?
With all my sins upon my head,
Must I to my account be sent
To suffer endless punishment?
2. Shall I my innocence declare
Arraign'd at God's tremendous bar,
Or plead, in his all-searching sight
My¹⁰ ignorance of wrong and right!
3. Have I not known the Master's will,
Who plainly saith, "Thou shalt not steal:
Shalt not commit adultery,
A liar, or a murderer be:
4. Thou shalt not take my Name in vain:
Shalt not my holy day prophane:
Witness untrue Thou shalt not bear:
Thou shalt not lust; thou shalt not swear:
5. Obedient to thy parents be,
And reverence¹¹ just authority:

⁹Appears also in MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 98–100. Published posthumously in *Poetical Works*, 8:347–49.

¹⁰Ori., "Θυρ."

¹¹Charles actually misspells: "reverence."

To idols Tthou shalt not bow down,
But serve and Love thy God alone.^[7]

6. All these I from my youth have broke
Have desperately cast off the yoke
Harden'd my heart, destroy'd my soul,
And made my sinful measure full.
7. What shall I do, my doom to shun,
Or how from swift damnation run?
Is there a mansion in the skies,
Or room for thieves in paradise?
8. No thief, he saith, shall enter in,
No soul unholy, or unclean,
No infidel to heaven shall go,
But find their dreadful place below.
9. God without faith I cannot please,
Or see him without holiness;
But devils, curst by wrath divine
Can boast a better faith than mine.
10. Devils believe, and tremble too
But I who own his saying true
"The wicked shall be turn'd to hell,"
No fear, and no repentance feel.

11. Past feeling thro' habitual sin,
My conscience sear'd for years has been,
Obdurate still my heart remains,
Nor shrinks¹² at everlasting pains.
12. Hopeless I must for ever die,
But He who pass'd the angels by
Beheld mankind with pitying look
And on Himself our nature took.
13. He bow'd the heavens, He left his throne,
He laid for all the ransom down, —
See there! He hangs on yonder tree!
He bows his head, and dies for me!
14. Return'd to heaven, again He lives,
To harden'd thieves repentance gives
In¹³ penitents his grace reveals
And pardon on their conscience seals.
15. Turn then, my Lord, my God unknown,
Whom with my parting breath I own
In death the kind conviction dart,
And cast a look, and break my heart.
16. A day's a thousand years to Thee,
Cut short thy gracious work in me,
And let me, swept from earth, remove
The captive of thy dying LOVE!

¹²Ori., "Starts."

¹³Ori., "To."

III.
For condemned Malefactors.¹⁴

- [1.] By vengence terribly o'retook,
By God ahhor'd, by man forsook,
Caught in the toils of hellish pain,
Of whom alas, can we complain?
2. We have the wages of our sin,
Who murtherers of ourselves have been,
Compell'd both God and man to clear,
We have our penal sufferings here.
3. Not for a single crime we die,
Millions of sins for justice cry,
Millions of sins, by man unknown;
Nor can our death for one atone.
4. Man's justice can no more demand,
But soon we at *his* bar shall stand,
Who knows the secrets of our hearts,
And gives to all their just deserts.
5. Guilty we must receive our hire,
Tormented in that quenchless fire,
If mercy does not interpose
To snatch us from eternal woes.

¹⁴Appears also in MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 100–102. Published posthumously in *Poetical Works*, 8:349–50 (with several alterations).

6. Being of beings, Source of Love,
If misery may thy pity move,
Remember Him who stain'd the tree,
And for his sake remember me!
7. Most wretched of the sinful race,
I ask his utmost power of grace,
Who saves in death repentant thieves,
And his own murtherers forgives.
8. Hear then his all-availing prayer,
Nor leave us in¹⁵ extreme despair,
But make thy richest mercies known,
And give us to thy pleading Son!

¹⁵Ori., "~~And snatch us from.~~"

III.
The Prayer of Condemned
Malefactors—May 10, 1785.¹⁶

- [1.] From trouble's abyss,
 To God the Most-high,
For pardon and peace
 We mournfully cry:
If MERCY intreated
 Is deaf to our prayer
We perish unpitied,
 We die in despair.
2. In fetters confin'd
 Our body complains,
Opprest is our mind
 With heavier chains;
A burden of evils
 We horribly feel,
It turns us to devils
 And sinks us to hell.
3. O who can abide
 Unquenchable fire!
With fiends we reside,
 And cannot expire,
If sent to our dwelling
 With spirits beneath,
With weeping, and wailing,
 And gnashing of teeth!

¹⁶Also appears in MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 102–104. Published posthumously in *Poetical Works*, 8:350.

4. The bottomless Pit
Expects us we know,
But we are not yet
In torments below:
Thro' boundless compassion
We cumber the ground,
And try, if salvation
And grace may be found.

5. Who¹⁷ consciously doom
Ourselves to the flame,
If such may presume
To call on thy Name,
Omnipotent JESUS,
Thy nature make known,
Our Purchaser, seize us,
And claim for thine own.

6. Thy wonderful power
Of saving exert,
And at our last hour
With love in thy heart,
With mercy receive us
Thy dearly-bought prize,
And dying forgive us,
And take to the skies.

¹⁷Ori., "We."

Another.¹⁸

- [1.] The soul that sins, if God is true,
 Shall die the death which ne'er shall end:
The endless death we own our due,
 Shoud He to hell this moment send
And plunge us in the burning Pool
Long as eternal ages roll.

2. Poor, guilty worms what can we plead,
 What in arrest of judgment say?
The Judge hath suffer'd in our stead,
 The Lamb hath born[e] our sins away,
Justice Divine is satisfied,
And man may live, for God hath died!

3. The co-eternal Son of God
 Hath laid the general ransom down
He bought our souls with all his blood,
 And pleads his death before the throne,
The powerful Advocate above
Of all who trust his dying love.

¹⁸These are the first three stanzas of the five-stanza hymn #7 published in *Prayers for Condemned Malefactors* (1785), 6. A vertical line is drawn through all three stanzas in the manuscript (likely to indicate publication). The back side of this page is blank and unnumbered in the manuscript.

For Condemned Mal[e]facto]rs.¹⁹

- [1.] JESUS, to Thee in faith we cry
For sinners justly doom'd to die,
Wisdom and Power Divine Thou art
And greater than their stubborn heart.
2. Author of penitential woe
That These the contrite grace may know,
Thy wrath against their sin reveal
Thy wrath, the antepast of hell.
3. Now let them feel the torturing fear
And tremble at damnation near,
O'rewhelm'd with horrible affright,
And plunging in eternal night.
4. With grief their flinty bosoms tear,
With hate of sin, and just despair
Which calls on rocks to hide their shame,
And screen them from the angry Lamb.
5. While wounded by thy Spirit's sword,
They sink into the pit abhor'd,
One ray of hope, in pity, dart
And cheer in death the broken heart:²⁰

¹⁹Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:318.

²⁰As the poem ends with a colon, it is possibly incomplete.

For Condemned Malefactors.²³

- [1.] JESUS, the Crucified for All,
Thy followers, on²⁴ thy Name we call,
Thy mercy we implore,
For These, our guilty brethren plead,
So soon to sink among the dead,
And to be seen no more.
2. Made, and redeem'd by Love divine,
Their precious souls are doubly thine,
Originally good;
And shall their precious souls be lost?
More than a thousand worlds they cost,
They cost Thee all thy blood.
3. Wilt Thou thy Property forego,
And leave them to thy ancient Foe,
Who waits to seize his prize,
And torture them in his own hell,
Doom'd to the fire unquenchable,
The worm that never dies!

²³Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:319–20.

²⁴Ori., “in.”

4. They have his faithful Servants been,
And claim the wages of their sin,
 Yet still belong to Thee;
Thou hast a ransom found, and paid,
For all their sins atonement made
 And bought them²⁵ on that tree!

5. That tree Thou never ca[n]st forget
Where loaded with the general debt,
 Thou didst our sorrows bear
That These, the Outcasts of mankind,
The gracious benefits might find
 Of thy expiring prayer.

6. Then help them with their parting breath
To plead thy meritorious death
 That a dead world might live:
O let thy Spirit take their part
And cry in every broken heart
 “My Lord, and God forgive!”²⁶

²⁵Ori., “Expiring.”

²⁶At the bottom of the page is a draft of this stanza in shorthand. The only significant variant is that the first line begins with “Assist” rather than “Then help.”

For a Condemned Malefactor.²⁷

- [1.] By violence from the body driven,
Where shall my naked soul appear?
A sinner, dying unforgiven,
I but begin my sufferings here.
2. Soon as I take my gloomy flight,
Vengeance will seize its destin'd prey,
And bound in chains of darkest night
Reserve me to that dreadful day.
3. All the foul secrets of my heart
And life that dreadful day shall show,
And God condemn me to depart
Accurst into eternal woe.
4. A moment here I still remain
(Before the Judge hath sentence past,)
T' escape th' intolerable pain,
The pain which shall forever last.
5. They tell me, who the Judge have known
Divinely good, humanely kind,
If I my sins and merits own,
Mercy ev'n I may hope to find.

²⁷Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:320–21.

6. They tell me, that my dying cry
For mercy He this moment hears,
And at the throne of God most high
The sinner's Advocate appears.
7. Jesus, Jehovah, God supreme,
I all my crimes to Thee confess,
From sin and endless death redeem,
Forgive, and bid me die in peace.
8. My trust is in thy blood alone,
Whom I my Lord and God adore:²⁸
Thy will concerning me be done
In life and death I ask no more.

²⁸Ori., "~~Whom I in life and death confess.~~"