

Reflections Upon Past Providences¹

October, 1749

[John Wesley]

O Lord, I bow my sinful head!
Righteous are all thy ways with man;
Yet suffer me with thee to plead,
With lowly rev'rence to complain;
With deep unutter'd grief to groan,
"O what is this that thou has done!"

Oft, as through giddy youth I rov'd
And danc'd along with flow'ry way,
By chance or thoughtless passion mov'd,
An easy, unresisting prey
I fell, while love's envenom'd dart
Thrill'd through my nerves, and tore my heart.

At length, by sad experience taught,
Firm I shook off the abject yoke;
Abhorr'd his sweetly-pois'nous draught,
Through all his wily fetters broke;
Fix'd my desires on things above,
And languish'd for celestial love!

Borne on the wings of sacred hope,
Long had I soar'd, and spurn'd the ground:
When, panting for the mountain-top,
My soul a kindred spirit found;
By heaven entrusted to my care,
The daughter of my faith and prayer.

In early dawn of life, serene,
Mild, sweet, and tender was her mood!
Her pleasing form spoke all within
Soft and compassionately good;
List'ning to every wretch's care,
Mingling with each her friendly tear.

In dawn of life, to feed the poor,

¹This poem is included in a manuscript (in the British Library) in John Wesley's hand detailing the events surrounding Grace Murray's marriage to John Bennett rather than to Wesley. The poem was first published in Henry Moore, *Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Kershaw, 1824–25), 2:167–71. The full manuscript is published in J. A. Leger, *John Wesley's Last Love* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1910), with the poem on pp. 98–105.

Glad she her little all bestow'd;
Wise to lay up a better store,
And hast'ning to be rich in God;
God whom she sought with early care,
With reverence and with lowly fear.

Ere twice four years pass'd o'er her head,
Her infant mind with love he fill'd;
His gracious, glorious name reveal'd,
And sweetly forc'd her heart to yield;
She groan'd t' ascend heaven's high abode,
To die into the arms of God!

Yet, warm with youth and beauty's pride,
Soon was her heedless soul betray'd;
From heaven her footsteps turn'd aside,
O'er pleasure's flow'ry plain she stray'd,
Fondly the toys of earth she sought,
And God was not in all her thought.

Not long—a messenger she saw,
Sent forth glad tidings to proclaim:
She heard, with joy and wond'ring awe,
His cry, "Sinners, behold the Lamb!"
His eye her inmost nature shook,
His word her heart in pieces broke.

Her bosom heav'd with lab'ring sighs,
And groan'd th' unutterable prayer;
As rivers, from her streaming eyes,
Fast flow'd the never-ceasing tear,
Till Jesus spake—"Thy mourning's o'er,
Believe, rejoice, and weep no more!"

She heard;—pure love her soul o'erflow'd,
Sorrow and sighing fled away;
With sacred zeal her spirit glow'd,
Panting His every word t' obey;
Her faith by plenteous fruit she shew'd,
And all her works were wrought in God.

Nor works alone her faith approv'd;
Soon in affliction's furnace tried
By him whom next to heaven she lov'd
As silver seven times purified,
Shone midst the flames her constant mind,
Emerg'd, and left the dross behind.

When death, in freshest strength of years,
Her much-loved friend tore from her breast,

Awhile she pour'd her plaints and tears,
But, quickly turning to her rest,
"Thy will be done!" she meekly cried,
"Suffice, for me the Saviour died!"

When first I view'd, with fix'd regard,
Her artless tears in silence flow,
"For thee are better things prepar'd,"
I said, "Go forth with Jesus go!
My Master's peace be on thy soul,
Till perfect love shall make thee whole!"

I saw her run, with winged speed,
In works of faith and lab'ring love;
I saw her glorious toil succeed,
And showers of blessings from above,
Crowning her warm effectual prayer,
And glorified my God in her.

Yet while to all her tender mind
In streams of pure affection flow'd
To one by ties peculiar join'd
One, only less belov'd than God,
"Myself," she said, "my soul I owe,—
My guardian angel here below!"

From heaven the grateful ardour came,
Pure from the dross of low desire;
Well-pleas'd I mark'd the guiltless flame,
Nor dar'd to damp the sacred fire,
Heaven's choicest gift on man bestow'd,
Strength'ning our hearts and hands in God.

'Twas now I bow'd my aching head,
While sickness shook the house of clay;
Duteous she ran with humble speed,
Love's tend'rest offices to pay,
To ease my pain, to soothe my care,
T' uphold my feeble hands in prayer.

Amaz'd, I cried, "Surely for me
A help prepar'd of heaven thou art!
Thankful I take the gift from thee,
O Lord! and nought on earth shall part
The souls that thou hast join'd above,
In lasting bonds of sacred love."

Abash'd she spoke, "O what is this?
Far above my boldest hope!
Can God, beyond my utmost wish,

Thus lift his worthless handmaid up?
This only could my soul desire!
This only had I dar'd require!"

From that glad hour, with growing love,
 Heaven's latest, dearest gift I view'd;
While, pleas'd each moment to improve,
 We urg'd our way with strength renew'd,
Our one desire, our common aim,
T' extol our gracious Master's name.

Companions now in weal and woe,
 No power on earth could us divide;
Nor summer's heat nor winter's snow
 Could tear my partner from my side;
Nor toil, nor weariness, nor pain,
Nor horrors of the angry main.

Oft, (though as yet the nuptial tie
 Was not,) clasping her hand in mine,
"What force," she said, "beneath the sky,
 Can now our well-knit souls disjoin?
With thee I'd go to India's coast,
To worlds in distant oceans lost!"

Such was the friend than life more dear,
 Whom in one luckless baleful hour,
(For ever mention'd with a tear!)
 The tempter's unresisted power
(O the unutterable smart!)
Tore from my inly-bleeding heart!

Unsearchable thy judgments are,
 O Lord! a bottomless abyss!
Yet sure thy love, thy guardian care,
 O'er all thy works extended is!
O why didst thou the blessing send?
Or why thus snatch away my friend?

What thou has done, I know not now;
 Suffice, I shall hereafter know!
Beneath thy chast'ning hand I bow;
 That still I live, to thee I owe.
O teach thy deeply-humbled son,
Father to say, "Thy will be done!"

Teach me, from every pleasing snare
 To keep the issues of my heart;
Be thou my love, my joy, my fear!
 Thou my eternal portion art!

Be thou my NEVER-FAILING FRIEND
And love, O love me to the end!