

A Short Account of Hannah Richardson (1741)¹

In mid-April 1741, while ministering in Bristol, Charles Wesley attended Hannah Richardson, a young woman drawn into the Methodist movement, during what proved to be the last days of her life. CW visited Richardson five times during her illness, and sent his brother John an extended account of these meetings in a journal letter.² The following month CW read his account of Richardson's death to the Methodist society in Bristol and found it a powerful means of drawing others to conversion (see MS Journal, May 31, 1741). This led JW to abridge CW's journal letter slightly, and publish it in August 1741 as

A Short Account of the Death of Mrs. Hannah Richardson. Published by the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A. [London: Strahan, 1741.]

This *Account* went through ten editions during CW's life, with only a few minor stylistic changes. It was the first of (and became a template for) a series of accounts of the "good death" of Methodists published as pamphlets and (later) in the *Arminian Magazine*.

The transcription which follows reproduces the first surviving edition of CW's *Account*, indicating the page transitions (in **red** font) of the original.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: Sept. 30, 2024.

²See CW, Journal Letter, April 14–25, 1741; in *The Journal Letters and Related Biographical Items of The Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, enlarged 2nd edn. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2023), 94–110.

**A Short
Account
of the Death of
Mrs. Hannah Richardson**

Published by the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.
Student of Christ-Church, Oxon.

[Bristol]

Saturday, April 19th,¹ 1741.

I was hastily called to one that was a-dying. It was Hannah Richardson, a young woman, who had long been a sincere mourner for Christ; a true Hannah, a woman of a sorrowful spirit.² God had awakened and drawn her from her infancy; and she heartily laboured to establish her own righteousness, seeking acceptance (as we did all) “not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.”³

When it pleased God to send the gospel of his free grace to this city, she gladly parted with her own righteousness, and submitted herself to the righteousness of God. She was a constant hearer of his word, but received no benefit by it; no comfort, no peace, no life. Yet she continued waiting for several months, till it pleased our Lord, who sends by whom he will send, to make use of my ministry, and apply the word of reconciliation to her soul. Jesus gave her a token for good, and she went home to her house justified. She rejoiced in God her Saviour, and testified, “In him I have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”⁴

But, alas the Comforter was “as a guest that tarrieth but a day.”⁵ She soon gave place to the reasoning devil, who asked, *How can these things be?*⁶ “How can you be justified, so vile a sinner as you? You only deceive yourself! Hath God for Christ’s sake forgiven [p. 2] you? He hath not surely forgiven you.” By such suggestions he well-nigh tore away her shield. All the comfort of her faith, all her peace and joy in believing, he did entirely spoil her of; God so permitting it, to try her, and prove her, and show her what was in her heart, that he might do her good in her latter end. He hid his face from her, and she was troubled. “I will allure her,” said God, “and bring her into the wilderness.”⁷ Here she long wandered out of the way, in a barren and dry land, where no water was.⁸ The poor and needy sought water, and there was none, and

¹Actually the 18th but all copies perpetuate the error.

²See 1 Sam. 1:15.

³Rom. 9:32.

⁴Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14.

⁵Wisd. of Sol. 5:14.

⁶See John 3:9.

⁷Hosea 2:14.

⁸See Ps. 63:1.

her tongue failed for thirst.⁹ She could truly say, with the prophet, “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself.”¹⁰ Or, with the patient man, Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him.”¹¹ Her bones were smitten asunder, as with a sword, while the enemy said unto her, “Where is now thy God? Where is now thy faith? Thou art a thousand times worse than ever.”

So indeed she seemed to herself, when sin *appeared* sin.¹² God was now uncovering her heart, and convincing her of original sin. The “old man of sin” was more and more “revealed,”¹³ till at last she saw that her “inward parts were very wickedness,”¹⁴ and “every imagination of the thoughts of her heart only evil continually.”¹⁵ She had no power to pray or praise, or so much as to think one good thought; and, at the same time, was so torn and distracted with doubts and fears, that she despaired even of life. That thought above all tormented her, “What would become of me, if I should die in this darkness? Without holiness no one shall see the Lord.”¹⁶ At other times she had a faint persuasion that God would finish his work before he called her hence.

She durst not say she had faith, or any interest in Christ; and yet she could not give it up. One little spark of hope lay as at the very bottom of her heart; [p. 3] which was Christ’s hold of her. He would not quit his purchase, or let her go.

Even this was often a great trouble to her, that she could not fear death as formerly (for this fear was entirely cast out, the first moment she was sensible of her justification). And whenever she had the least comfort or peace, she started back, as it were, and feared to take hold of it, suspecting that she was falling asleep again, and resting without Christ. She went mourning all the day long, and refused to be comforted, because he was not.

For many days and months she walked on still in darkness, and had no light; but “against hope believed in hope”;¹⁷ staggering oftentimes, but not falling, through unbelief. Still she bore up under her continual fears of being a castaway. She waited in a constant use of all the means of grace, never missed the communion, or hearing the word; though all was torment to her, for she never found benefit. Nothing, she said, affected her; there was none so wicked as her. I am a witness to her many complaints and wailings. Yet she persisted with a glorious obstinacy; and “followed on to know the Lord, walking in all his commandments and ordinances blameless.”¹⁸ She went on steadily in the way of her duty, never intermitting it on account of her inward conflicts. Not slothful in business, but working almost continually with her own hands. Most

⁹See Isa. 41:17.

¹⁰Isa. 45:15.

¹¹Job 23:8–9.

¹²Cf. Rom. 7:13.

¹³Cf. 2 Thess. 2:3.

¹⁴Ps. 5:9.

¹⁵Cf. Gen. 6:5.

¹⁶See Heb. 12:14.

¹⁷Rom. 4:18.

¹⁸Cf. Hosea 6:3 and Luke 1:6.

strict was she, and unblamable in all her relative duties, and in all manner of conversation. Those who lived with her never heard a light and trifling word come out of her mouth. She did not sit *still*,¹⁹ till she should be pure in heart, but redeemed the time, and bought up every opportunity of doing good.²⁰ To do good she never forgot; but spoke to all, and warned all, both children and grown persons, as God delivered them into her hands. She was exceeding tender-hearted towards the sick, whether in body or soul. She could not “rejoice with those that rejoiced; but she “wept with those that wept,”²¹ and encouraged them to wait upon God, who hid his face from her, to be [p. 4] never weary of well-doing; for in the end, said she, they would reap if they faint not.

See here a pattern of true mourning! A spectacle for men and angels! A soul standing up under the intolerable weight of original sin! Troubled on every side; perplex”ed, but not in despair; persecuted by sin, the world, and the devil, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; walking on as evenly under that load of darkness, as if she had been in the broad light of God’s countenance. Whosoever thou art that seekest Christ sorrowing, “go thou and do likewise.”²²

In this agony she continued, till it pleased God to visit her with her last sickness. For the two or three first days she could not be kept from the word; but was then constrained to take her bed. She had early notice of her departure, and told one of her band that she should not recover. She had expressed great earnestness to see me, but I could not visit her till the Thursday following. I then found her, to her own sense and feeling, in utter despair. “I am dying,” she cried, “without pardon, without a Saviour, without hope.” I prayed in full assurance of faith, and then testified the love of Christ to her, a lost sinner; declaring to her that he would fulfil in her the work of faith with power. “My soul for yours” (I told her) “if you depart hence before your eyes have seen his salvation. Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”²³ The word of our God shall stand for ever.²⁴ Everyone that seeketh findeth.²⁵ Fear not. Behold, he comes quickly; and one moment of his presence will make you abundant amends for all the pain of absence.”²⁶

When I was gone, her sufferings rather increased, and Satan raged the more. The lion tore her, as it were, to pieces. She was in a mighty conflict, and said, “None knows what I have gone through in this sickness. My enemy triumphs over me. It is the hour of darkness. It is more than I am able to bear.” [p. 5]

“The captive exile hasteneth that she maybe loosed, and that she should not die in the pit,

¹⁹In early 1741 CW was drawn briefly to the “stillness” of the Moravians (see JW, *Journal*, Jan. 22, 28, and Feb. 12, 1741). Having overcome this, he now honored all who refused to stand “still,” living instead in the full means of grace.

²⁰See Eph. 5:16.

²¹Rom. 12:15.

²²Luke 10:37.

²³See Heb. 10:37.

²⁴See Isa. 40:8.

²⁵See Matt. 7:8.

²⁶See Rev. 22:12.

nor that her bread should fail.”²⁷ This trial was the severest of all. “The devil” (she said) “besets me sorely. I shall never hold out. I shall perish at last; But if I am lost, I am content. Though I go down to hell, let but Christ be with me, and I will go without fear.” Here she seemed to be strengthened to endure a greater agony. She drank of the cup which her Lord drank of, and had fellowship in those sufferings which made him cry out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!”²⁸ To complete her distress, the angel of death came! She was struck and changed on a sudden (so that one came and told me she was just a-dying). Then, as man would judge, she let go her hold of God; and “the spirit failed before him, and the soul which he had made.”²⁹

In this dreadful moment, this last extremity, this deepest distress the human soul is capable of, the Comforter came. The Lord, her Saviour, came suddenly to his temple. “As lightning shineth from one end of the heaven unto the other, so was the coming of the Son of man.”³⁰ He took away the veil from her heart, and revealed himself in her in a manner the world knoweth not of. She broke out, “Now I know that Christ died for me. He hath washed me from all my sins in his precious blood. I have eternal life abiding in me.”

Soon after she had found redemption, I called and saw her in full triumph of faith. O how unlike what she was in my last visit! “If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature.”³¹ This is the work which despisers “will not believe, though a man declare it unto them.”³² Her soul was passed from death unto life; an hidden, everlasting life in God. After we had prayed she witnessed a good confession. “I believe in Jesus Christ; I feel the truth of these words of his, ‘I am the resurrection and the life.’”³³ I have no fear, no doubt, no trouble. Your words were true. He has fulfilled his promise.”

Never did I behold a soul so filled. Some of her words were, “Now indeed he has made me amends [p. 6] for my waiting. Blessed be God, all my pain is nothing! I have suffered nothing! I smell the sweet odour of the name of Jesus. His smell is as the smell of Lebanon. Who is so sweet as my beloved? ‘My beloved is mine, and I am his.’”³⁴ I love Jesus Christ with all my heart I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. But his will be done. I have no will of my own.” While I was saying, “Doubt not, but be ‘persuaded that neither life nor death, nor things present, nor things ...’”³⁵ she interrupted me with, “No, no. I cannot doubt, although I did doubt. I cannot fear now. Perfect love hath cast out fear.”³⁶ I have full redemption in the blood of Jesus.”

To her sisters she had said before I came, “Heaven is open! I see Jesus Christ with all his angels and saints in white; and I am joined to them. I shall never be parted more. I see what I

²⁷Isa. 51:14.

²⁸Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34.

²⁹Cf. Isa. 57:16.

³⁰Cf. Matt. 24:27; Luke 17:24.

³¹2 Cor. 5:17.

³²Cf. Acts 13:41.

³³John 11:25.

³⁴Song of Sol. 2:16.

³⁵1 Cor. 3:22.

³⁶See 1 John 4:18.

cannot utter or express! Cannot you see Jesus Christ? There, there he stands, ready to receive you all! O do not doubt of the love of Jesus. Look on me! If he has taken me into his bosom, who need despair? Fear not, fear not. He is loving unto every man. *I believe Christ died for all.*"

Her first words after I left her were, "Liberty! Liberty! This is the glorious liberty of the sons of God! I know it, I see it, I feel it. Believe, believe there is such a liberty, and he will give it you. *I am sanctified wholly, spirit, soul, and body.*"³⁷

She had spent the time while I was absent in fervent prayer; and at my third visit told me, "I have whatsoever I ask. I have asked life for my mother and sisters, and have obtained it." I took the opportunity, and put her upon praying for the peace of Jerusalem, for union, and for the preachers of reprobation, that God might open their eyes; for my brother, and for the lambs of this fold, that they might not be turned out of the way.

The fourth time I came to see her they told me she had been in a great conflict; oftentimes repeating, [p. 7] "I will wrestle with thee for a blessing. I will not let thee go unless thou bless him."³⁸ Bless that soul. Give him the thing I ask." At last she said, "Now I am more than conqueror. I have the petitions I ask. Not one is unanswered."

To me she said, "I have power with God and with man, and have prevailed."³⁹

From expounding at the malt-room, I returned the last time, and found her ready for the Bridegroom. Her every word was full of power, and life, and love. It was the Spirit of her Father which spoke in her. She had been wrestling again, and making intercession for the saints and all mankind; particularly our own Church and nation. Some of her words were: "Thy judgments are abroad in the earth. O that the inhabitants of this land may learn righteousness! Grant me, sweet Jesus, that they may repent and live." She prayed fervently for the society, that they might abide in the word, keep close together, and be all of one heart and mind. "There is a curse upon them" (said she) "a curse of unthankfulness; but I have prayed my dear Lord to remove it, and he will remove it."

When one of her sisters came to see her, who was deeply mourning for Christ, she laboured much to comfort her. Bade her look at *her*, so miserable and hopeless an unbeliever lately, and assured her the Comforter should quickly come. At the sight of her sister's tears, oh how sweetly did she lament over her! I never saw such sympathy! The spirit in her mourned like a turtle-dove, and made intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered.⁴⁰

All the time of her sickness she never once complained or showed the least sensibility of pain, or that she had any body at all. When one asked her if she did not feel her pains, being then in strong convulsions, she answered, "My pain is great; but I do not feel it. It does not trouble me. I choose it rather than ease. For my Lord chooses it. Pain or ease, life or death, 'tis all one. The Spirit beareth witness with my spirit, that I am a child of [p. 8] God."⁴¹ I have the earnest of mine inheritance in my heart. I have no will. I am made perfect in love."

I asked whether that peace which she tasted above a year ago was the same she now enjoyed. She answered, "It was of the same kind, in the lowest or first degree. It surely was

³⁷See 1 Thess. 5:23.

³⁸See Gen. 32:26.

³⁹See Gen. 32:28.

⁴⁰See Rom. 8:26.

⁴¹See Rom. 8:16.

justification.”

After I went she said, “This day shall I be with him in paradise.⁴² Within four and-twenty hours I shall be with my beloved.”

She continued all night in the labour of love, making powerful supplication for all men. About three on Sunday morning she said, “It is finished.”⁴³ All suffering, even for others, ceased from that moment, and she began the new song which shall never end. Her whole employment now was the same with theirs to whom she was come, the innumerable company of angels, the church of the first-born. She sang to the harper’s harp, without any intermission, till two in the afternoon—even while they were giving her cordials she sang. Her hope was full of immortality; her looks, of heaven; till, with smiles of triumph, she resigned her spirit into the hands of her dear Redeemer. Death wanted all its pomp and circumstances of horror. She went away without any agony, or sigh, or groan. She only rested, and sweetly fell asleep in the arms of Jesus.

Source: CW, A Short Account of the Death of Mrs. Hannah Richardson ([London: Strahan, 1741]).

⁴²See Luke 23:43.

⁴³See John 19:30.