MS Death of Prudence Box

Prudence Box was a young woman who served as maid or servitor for the Charles Wesley family through much of the 1770s. She was particularly close to the children, who were surely troubled by the significant pain accompanying her illness that culminated in death in January 1778 (see stanza 2 below). Once again, Charles marked the occasion of the death of a close family friend with a hymn.

The form of the hymn transcribed below is a looseleaf draft that was surely Wesley’s initial working copy, laden with numerous revisions. A more polished form was included in MS Funeral Hymns.

MS Death of Prudence Box is part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre, accession number MA 1977/583/16 (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.

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1This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: August 1, 2010.
On the Death of
Prudence Box,
Jan. 9, 1778.2

[1.] HE’s come!—to set the prisoner free,
The3 dear Redeemer’s come!
To give4 the final Victory,
And take5 his Servant home;
To wipe the sorrow from her eyes,
To end her mourning days,
And shew her soul the glorious prize,
In6 his unclouded Face.

2. Long in the toils of death she lay,
Nor fear’d the ghastly7 king,
When Christ had borne her sins away,
And spoil’d him of his sting:
Lingring she drank the bitter8 cup
Of grief and9 pain extreme,
And fill’d his after-passion up
And tasted death10 with Him.

2A more polished manuscript draft appears in MS Funeral Hymns, 89–91. Published posthumously in Poetical Works, 6:339–41; and Unpublished Poetry, 3:327–29 (which includes both versions of stanza 5 found in this draft).

3Ori., “The”; changed to “Her,” and finally changed back to “The.”
4Ori., “And-gives.”
5Ori., “taketh.”
6Ori., “And.”
7Ori., “grizly.”
8Ori., “Yet still she tasted death, the.”
9Ori., “He drank with.”
10Ori., “shared the grief”; changed to “tasted death.”
3. Seeing the\(^{11}\) great Invisible
   Her Saviour and her Friend,
   She suffer’d all his righteous will,
   And suffer’d to the end:
   Thro’ a long vale of misery\(^{12}\)
   She walk’d with Christ her Guide,
   And bleeding on the sacred tree
   Confess’d the Crucified.

4. With all the Spirit’s powers she pray’d
   With infinite desire,
   To bow, her weary fainting\(^{13}\) head,
   And on his cross\(^{14}\) expire:
   The agonizing prayer\(^{15}\) was heard,
   For everlasting peace;
   While yet\(^{16}\) her gracious Lord defer’d
   To sign her soul’s release.

[5.\(^{17}\) She languishes\(^{18}\) in life detain’d,
   Superior grace\(^{19}\) to prove,
   Unshaken hope and\(^{20}\) faith unfeign’d
   And all-victorious\(^{21}\) love.
   Love, heavenly love her heart o’reflows
   Immense and unconfin’d
   To friends and relatives and foes
   Imbracing all mankind.]

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\(^{11}\) Ori., “th’ In” changed to “the.” The strikeout “In” is the first two letters of “Invisible,” which Wesley decided to put at the end of the line.

\(^{12}\) Ori., “agony.”

\(^{13}\) Ori., “like Him her dying”; changed to “her weary fainting.”

\(^{14}\) Ori., “in his arms.”

\(^{15}\) Ori., “wish for holiness”; then changed to “prayer importunate”; and finally to “agonizing prayer.”

\(^{16}\) Ori., “Yet still.”

\(^{17}\) Wesley made several changes to this first draft of stanza 5, then drew three vertical lines through the entire stanza and started over on p. 3.

\(^{18}\) Ori., “She languish’d still.”

\(^{19}\) Ori., “Her gratitude.”

\(^{20}\) Ori., “Her patience meek her.”

\(^{21}\) Ori., “all-embracing.”
5. He holds her, still in life detain’d,
   Her ripen’d grace to prove,
   Her stedfast hope, and faith unfeign’d,
   And all-victorious love;
   To emulate\textsuperscript{22} his sacrifice
   Obtain a richer\textsuperscript{23} crown,
   And point us to the opening skies,
   And pray\textsuperscript{24} the Saviour down.

6. “Unutterable things I see—
   The purchase of his\textsuperscript{25} blood,
   The place He hath deserv’d\textsuperscript{26} for me,
   Come, O my Lord, my God!”\textsuperscript{[1]}
   “I dare [not]\textsuperscript{27} murmur at thy stay;
   “But to depart is best:”\textsuperscript{[9]}
   Come, O my Jesus, come away,
   And take me into rest.\textsuperscript{28}

7. Into thy hands my soul\textsuperscript{29} receive,
   That Thee my soul may bless,
   May thee entirely love\textsuperscript{30} and live
   To thine eternal praise.
   She speaks, and hears the joyful\textsuperscript{31} word
   Come up my ready bride—
   And angels waft her to her Lord
   And seat her at his side!

\textsuperscript{22} Ori., “United with.”
\textsuperscript{23} Ori., “To win a brighter”; changed to “Obtain a richer.”
\textsuperscript{24} Ori., “bring.”
\textsuperscript{25} Ori., “That purchase of thy.”
\textsuperscript{26} Ori., “That place Thou hast prepar’d” changed to “The place He hath deserv’d.”
\textsuperscript{27} Ori., “cannot”; changed to “dare.” Wesley likely meant to retain “not.”
\textsuperscript{28} Ori., “to thy breast.”
\textsuperscript{29} Ori., “Now in thy mercy’s Arms.”
\textsuperscript{30} Ori., “Intirely love my God.”
\textsuperscript{31} Ori., “He speaks, and hears the Saviour’s.”