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ON THE

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✓
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EMBRACING

SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

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A

WESTERN PATRIARCH.

THE generation, of which very few are still living, furnished many models of good sense, solid worth, and extensive usefulness. Some of these were of the finest mould. Nor has any part of the land been adorned with brighter examples of virtue than many portions of the West. The personal history of these men was full of incidents, suited to form their characters to patience and courage. But their religious experience and characters belong to the history of redemption, and will never cease to interest pious men.

I have known a few such, and have heard of others. Within the last eighteen months, I have come to the knowledge of one, who was a very remarkable man. I never saw him; but I have taken pains to gain correct information respecting him, and I give the following sketch in full confidence of its minute accuracy.

He was born in County Derry, Ireland, on the 4th of March, 1765. When he was about nine years of age, his parents came to this country, bringing him with them. They found a home in what was then a newly settled portion of Eastern Pennsylvania. They were in humble circumstances. Their abode was in the bosom of the forest. The subject of this notice was their eldest son. His early life was one of constant toil and great privation. Books and schools were rare. The day was chiefly spent in labour and adventure. Candles and lamps were not in vogue. Torchlight was a substitute. Many an evening did our boy spend in reading, by this light, the few books which the piety of his parents had procured.

Manhood approaching, he went to the business of a millwright. Having learned his trade, he crossed the mountains,

erected mills in various places, going as far as Kentucky, and thus improved his worldly affairs. In the year 1800, he permanently settled in a part of the West, where land was cheap, society improving, and a prospect of regular preaching held out. A church was soon organized, and he was chosen one of its elders. This office he held for nearly half a century, with credit to himself, and profit to the church.

He had great natural strength of mind. Surmounting all early disadvantages, he amassed a rich store of valuable and various information. He thirsted for knowledge, and dug for it as for hid treasure. To him labour was pleasure, where knowledge was the prize. By many others besides his family he was resorted to for information. His mind grasped a subject with great tenacity until it was fairly mastered. However laborious the investigation might be, he seemed unwilling to drop any subject until he had definite ideas respecting it. Like Edwards, he seemed to have resolved, "when I think of any theorem in divinity to be solved, immediately to do what I can towards solving it, if circumstances do not hinder." His patience of inquiry was often remarked on by others. In reading the old divines, of whom he was particularly fond, he would not pass a quotation in a dead language until he understood it. In time he acquired such a knowledge of Latin and Greek, that he could ordinarily discover the sense of any quotation in them. But if left in doubt, he did not rest till he had procured the aid of a sound scholar. If the passage was long or difficult, he would secure a written translation. Having lost an infant son, his mind was for a time greatly interested on the subject of the future state of such. No vague notions or analogies would satisfy him. His resort was to God's word. It is believed that he examined every text, that has ever been supposed to bear on the subject. Thus his conclusions were the result of prayer and of searching the Scriptures. They were of course stable and intelligent. On important questions he took no opinion on trust. He often expressed strong dislike to the word "cannot." He knew by experience that great difficulties might still be vincible. His favourite proverbs on such subjects were, "What has been done can be done," and, "All things are possible to industry and energy." He never sunk his individuality in the masses around him. He had a life, a character and mission, quite his own.

Yet he was both social and modest. Both as a Christian

and as a man, he seemed to esteem others better than himself. None but his intimate friends knew his attainments or character, except by report. In the presence of strangers he was through life constrained and shrinking. Three or four young men, preparing for the ministry, were taken into his house. All of them learned greatly to venerate him. At his funeral, one of them, a minister of high character, said that he considered him the best theologian and the most spiritually-minded Christian he had ever known; and that he had felt more diffidence in preaching or expressing an opinion on any difficult point of doctrine or religious experience before him, than before any man he had ever known.

The greatest defect of his character, the soul of his body of sin, was a temper impatient of opposition. His passions were quick and violent, though undue excitement was soon over. He was one of the kindest and most sympathizing friends; yet his aversions were equally strong. Often his passions were kindled into a flame, and in a moment something was said or done, which filled him with subsequent shame or sorrow. Through life this was regarded by himself and his friends as the weak point of his character. Indeed, it marred his peace, interrupted his communion with God, proved a stumbling-block to some, and was lamented by none so deeply as by himself. It was pleasant to see, that as his piety matured, his conflicts with this besetting sin were more and more successful.

The religious experience of such a man must have been marked and striking, profound, earnest, abounding with conflict, and clearly and boldly defined. Of the noble Scottish race, his ancestors, in unbroken succession from their settlement in Ireland, were pious. His parents, though in humble life, adorned their Christian profession. They had the unspeakable pleasure of seeing all their children making a credible profession of faith in Christ. Their oldest daughter has left behind her a name which is better than great riches. She was indeed a mother in Israel, and will long be remembered in the church where she recently finished her course. From early childhood, the subject of this notice was deeply impressed with religious truth, and evinced great tenderness of conscience. When quite a child, he often retired to a grove near his father's house, and spent the Sabbath in reading, meditation, and prayer. Besides the house of God, no spot on earth was so hallowed in his memory as

that grove. Yet he did not then esteem himself a child of God. But when, by searching the Scriptures in after life, his views of the nature and marks of true piety were settled, he often said: "If I am indeed a child of God, I became such when very young. If I now indeed love the Lord, my memory does not go back to the time when I did not love him."

Yet it was not until he reached manhood, that he applied for admission into the church of God. Previous to this, he passed through many seasons of declension and darkness. He used to say: "I often tried to get away from my Lord, but he held me fast, and would not let me go." During this period he had very few public religious privileges. Sometimes he did not hear a sermon for several months, for in those days, where he was, there was a famine of the word of God. Yet if a walk of ten or fifteen miles would bring him to a place of solemn convocation, he gladly undertook it. On one occasion he heard that a Presbyterian minister would preach at a place nearly fifteen miles distant, and, having no shoes, nor opportunity of buying them, he sat up an entire night, made a pair of shoes as well as he could, and, on Lord's day, walked the whole distance. He often said that never in his life was he so well paid for his work. When hindered from attending public worship on the Sabbath, he sought retirement. There, with his Bible and a copy of Ambrose's "*Looking unto Jesus*," his companion through life, he sought communion with God.

In early manhood he fell into a state of coldness and backsliding, which lasted for some time. But the good Shepherd had his eye on his wandering sheep, and brought him back to his fold again, though with labour and sorrow of heart. Bunyan has used no stronger terms, and has expressed no more vivid experience than he, in referring to this period of his history. For some years he was nearly engulfed in despair. He regarded his case as special and peculiar. He often feared that he had sinned beyond the reach of mercy, yet could he by no means cease to plead for pardon. At length his health suffered, and the roaring lion seemed to come upon him with extreme violence. He was even tempted to curse God and die. Yet such thoughts filled him with horror. At last a ray of hope dawned upon him. God, who is confined to no particular order or class of means, enabled him in a dream to see how willingly and effectually Christ

could save him. He did not regard this dream as a revelation, but as mercifully designed to make an impression of truth already revealed. It gave a new course to his waking thoughts, led him to more Scriptural views of the fulness and freeness of salvation by Christ, and thus soon awakened a more comfortable hope in his atoning blood and justifying righteousness. But the tempter soon returned, and plied him with doubts concerning the doctrines of grace. Having heard these views of truth much perverted and slandered, and the remains of his carnal nature opposing some things in them, he yet thought that they were taught by the Bible, and illustrated in his own experience; but he saw difficulties, which gave him a sore conflict. Having begun in the Spirit, he was tempted to end in the flesh. Of one thing he had no doubt, viz. that the Bible is true. He determined that the word of God should settle the controversy. So he gave himself to reading the lively oracles, resolved to receive all they taught. He became as familiar with their teachings on this subject as he was with the faces of his family. It is believed that very few ministers of the Gospel could give more or better proofs of the only way of salvation for sinners than he could. As he was busy during the day, it was his custom to commit to memory at night some portion of Scripture, treating of this subject, and then, as opportunity offered, he meditated on it, while engaged, the next day, in secular pursuits. In this way he went through the entire Bible, viewing its teachings on the subject in various aspects, and tracing them out in their different bearings. The result was a thorough conviction, never again seriously shaken, that the doctrines of grace are the glory of the Gospel. In this stage of religious experience few men have had greater doubts, conflicts, fightings and fears. In later periods of life few have had greater peace in believing. The evening of his religious life, if not cloudless, was yet without storms, and the Sun of righteousness commonly shone with great effulgence. During his last illness not a doubt or fear assailed him. Often he said: "I cannot but believe that I love God. I love his word, his ordinances, his people, and his service. And why do I love him? I can only say, 'We love him, because he first loved us,' and 'Having loved his own, he loved them to the end.'" Thus his soul was at peace amidst the swellings of Jordan. It is true, however, that in the early stage of his last illness, he expressed great apprehen-

sions lest his constitutional impatience should betray him, and bring dishonour on religion. His disease (dropsy of the chest) was of the most distressing kind. To his intimate Christian friends he expressed his solicitude on the subject. And more than once, when he thought he was alone, was he heard pleading for grace to make and keep him patient. Very remarkably were his prayers answered. Throughout his whole illness he was as gentle as a little child. To all who entered his room he desired to say something for Christ. When his physician and friends reminded him that speaking aggravated his malady, he replied; "My living testimony has been so imperfect, I wish now to bear my dying testimony for Jesus." When unable to articulate, his lips were still seen to move, and the last words heard from him were, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

From the time he joined the church he was a diligent and devout student of the Bible. His love for the sacred volume was an unquenchable fire. Few men have studied it more or understood it better. His early advantages of education were extremely limited. But so strong was his desire to read the very words of the Holy Ghost, that at fifty years of age, without a regular instructor, and with but a meagre supply of books, he commenced the study of the Hebrew language, and persevered until he made himself a critical Hebrew scholar. Till very near his death, his Hebrew Psalter was his constant companion. He never seemed weary of dwelling on the very words of God. For more than thirty years, few entered his room in the evening without finding him intently occupied with the Hebrew Scriptures and Scott's Commentary. It was his uniform custom to spend the entire evening in searching the Scriptures. In the latter years of his life, when he was retired from business, this was well nigh his sole employment. This he did with an eagerness and pleasure, that showed how deeply his heart felt the power and relished the sweetness of God's truth. The Bible was to him indeed the only rule of faith and practice. He uniformly referred all his opinions and acts to this standard. When any doctrinal or ecclesiastical questions arose, the Biblical argument was with him decisive and final. The words of Scripture were to him the voice of God, which it is our concern to hear, understand, believe, and obey.

His love for the sanctuary and for social worship was strong and enduring. He really esteemed a day in God's

house as better than a thousand spent in worldly pursuits. It is credibly said of him that for near half a century he was never absent from church or from the regular prayer-meeting, except on account of serious sickness. Even in extreme old age, if he was able to walk, he insisted on going to the house of prayer. He would say: "It will not be long that I can be with you, and it does me good to go." Whether it rained or shined, whether few or many went to the house of God, his seat was never vacant, except when the Master laid his hand upon him.

As an elder, he was prompt, active, and useful. He never declined any duty, fairly laid upon him, because it was laborious or painful. To the burdened soul he was ever ready to give words of counsel and encouragement. And as the pastor of the church lived some distance from town, he was often resorted to. To the sick he was a constant and welcome visitor. His warm heart and cordial sympathy caused him to be afflicted in all the afflictions of his brethren. Conscious of his own infirmities, he guarded his words and acts, lest he should injure others. He understood and felt the spirit of that noble declaration of Paul: "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth." When the Temperance Reformation commenced, he had just completed, at a heavy cost, a still-house. He had put it into operation with fair prospects of being able soon to relieve himself from pecuniary embarrassments, which had come upon him. His pastor and many members of the church early espoused the Temperance cause; and although he *then* believed the business lawful, yet, rather than give offence to his brethren, he at once and at great loss abandoned it.

His sympathy with the Redeemer's cause was hearty and profound. Nothing afforded him so much solid pleasure as news of a revival of pure religion, or tidings of the spread of the Gospel in heathen countries. In every good work he was ready to co-operate. It greatly grieved him that he was able to do so little for the advancement of Christ's cause. Yet he was delighted to see others doing more than he was able to effect.

But his own spiritual life, more than everything else, gave him a marked and striking character. He was eminently a man of faith. His faith was indeed "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." In his apprehension, spiritual and invisible things were not fictions,

not probabilities, but realities. In his view, God was a real Father, Jesus Christ a real Friend and Saviour, the Holy Spirit a real Guide and Comforter, and heaven a real inheritance and home. He looked at things unseen and eternal. He walked as seeing Him who is invisible. To keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man was therefore the purpose of his heart. When affliction came, his great concern was that it might be sanctified. In every change he said: "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth to him good." He was pre-eminently a man of prayer. Neither business, nor company, nor any thing else could keep him from his closet. One, who sometimes overheard his language in secret devotion, has described it as fervid and wrestling importunity, as reverent and childlike pleading with God. Indeed I have had a description of his intercessions for his own soul, for his family, for his neighbours, and for the church of Christ, which I can compare to nothing so well as to those of Abram for the cities of the plain, or to Jacob's wrestling with the angel. Yet perhaps no man more carefully sought privacy in his seasons of secret communion with God. When he supposed no one was noticing him, he often uttered his thoughts in words, and then were often heard his pious ejaculations. He was often consulted in cases of difficulty, and his first words almost uniformly were: "Pray over it. Do nothing without prayer." In all acts of public worship reverence was prominent; yet he was fervent also, and, when leading the devotions of others, his heart and his words were full of warmth. He was eminently spiritually-minded. The religious aspect of every event was his favourite view of it. The spiritual interests of others were, to his mind, the chief objects of solicitude concerning them. If their souls had health and prospered, nothing could be very wrong. The secret of the Lord was with him, and he showed him his covenant. He was a close observer of Providence, and often saw coming events, which as yet were hidden from the careless and inexperienced.

His religious character was of the earnest and energetic type. Everything about him showed that he was aping no one else. What he was, he was intensely. What his hand found to do, he did it with his might.

In his family, his example and authority were thrown with powerful energy on the side of truth, duty, and vital religion. All saw that with him the one thing needful was spiritual

prosperity. No one doubted that he would make everything yield to the paramount claims of God. He had a solemn and habitual sense of his responsibility as the head of a household. In family worship nothing was hurried, yet he was not tedious. After reading a portion of Scripture, with Scott's Practical Observations on it, he often added "a word in season." A psalm or hymn was next sung.

Then kneeling down to Heaven's eternal King,
The *saint*, the *father*, and the *husband* prayed.

Every Sabbath evening his family were assembled to repeat the Shorter Catechism. On these occasions he used no book. His memory was a faithful servant, both as to questions and answers. This exercise was enlivened with appropriate explanations and remarks.

Among other children, he had a son who, in early life, had so severe an attack of illness that his physicians gave him up. Pulse and breath were almost gone. The father went to call the elders of the church to pray for the child. He met his pious and faithful pastor, a venerable man, and brought him and two elders to the room where the sick lay. They interceded for his recovery with great importunity; and then and there the father vowed a vow, saying, "If the Lord will raise up this child, I will solemnly devote him to God for ever, and do all in my power to lead him into the ministry of the gospel." The sick child was healed, and the good man deferred not to pay his vow. As soon as the child was able to understand the matter, his father told him what had occurred, and often afterwards adverted to it, both in conversation and in his letters. The question of serving God in the ministry of the gospel was thus kept before the mind of the son, who was ever taught to look upon the office of a bishop as a good work, most solemn and most honourable. That son became for a while the pastor of the church in which his father was an elder, and the good old man heard from his lips many a sweet gospel sermon. The son is now filling one of the high places on the walls of Zion. Such is the brief outline of the history and character of Joseph Smith, Esq., who died at Mercer, Pennsylvania, on the 31st of July, 1849. This narrative suggests several very weighty truths.

1. Early piety is still possible. Jeremiah and John the Baptist were savingly renewed from their birth. In more modern times, many persons of undoubted piety have traced

their saving impressions to very early childhood. We ought to pray and labour for the conversion of our children while they are yet young. It requires no higher intellectual capacity to love than to hate divine things. He who has mind enough to commit sin, has mind enough to work righteousness. How honourable it is to God, when out of the mouths of babes and sucklings he ordains strength, and thus stills the adversary! What an ornament to religion, even in childhood, was she who afterwards became the wife of President Edwards! Who can read the account of Joseph Smith spending his Sabbaths alone in the retired grove, and doubt that then he was holding communion with Christ? Some are skeptical on the subject of very early piety, and brutish men scoff at it. But this is no new thing; for "when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that Jesus did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the son of David, they were sore displeased." Let the wicked rage, if they will; but let God's people spare no pains to bring their little ones to know and love the Saviour. Has he not said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God?"

2. A true child of God may fall into sad spiritual declension, and may not soon be recovered from it. So the Scriptures teach. Peter fell, and was soon brought to repentance. But David's conscience was dreadfully stupid for a long time. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." The Laodiceans were "lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot," yet they said they were "rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, and knew not that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." So that one may be a backslider and not know it. But however long this sad state may last, if God has really begun a good work, he will not leave it unfinished. He will reclaim the wandering. If his people forsake his law, and walk not in his statutes, he will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless, his loving kindness he will not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. These stripes are sometimes many and severe. It is often best that they should be. God says: "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee." "The backslider in heart

shall be filled with his own ways." Backsliders often suffer more anguish of spirit than they did when first brought to repentance. David seems to have done so. Indeed some think he never fully recovered that joyous exultation in God, for which he was so remarkable before his fall. Let not any man suppose that he is not a "backslider *in heart*," because he has not sinned openly. David sinned secretly first, and openly afterwards. If you have departed from God, listen to his words of kindness: "Return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously." To such God says: "I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon." A recovery from backsliding is sometimes mistaken for a first conversion.

3. True religion is the same in all ages of the world, and in all conditions of life. It is the same in principle. It is the same in its effects. It stains the pride of all glory. It humbles the soul. It begets love to all God's commands. It stirs up the spirit of prayer. It restores the image of God. It awakens penitence. It teaches men to walk by faith, not by sight. The whole life of a Christian is a warfare. To a real servant of God, Christ is precious, a fountain of joy, a well-spring of life, and munitions of rocks. It is, however, true that, in degree, religion is not always the same. Some are babes in Christ; some are carnal, halting professors; and some are strong in the Lord. Let us labour to be eminently holy. What a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Eminent piety is as attainable now as in any previous age of the world. The saint who shall wear the brightest crown in heaven may be unknown to nearly all his own generation, unknown to future ages of the church militant, but not unknown to God. The brightest patterns of piety are seldom found in conspicuous stations.

4. As in the days of Elijah, so now there are probably many humble believers where we think there are few or none. That great man said: "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone,

and they seek my life." But what saith the answer of God to him? "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." No doubt God now has humble servants where we little suspect it. The tares and wheat grow together, and to a careless observer may seem alike. For years Joseph Smith may have passed for a man of the world, while we have good reason to believe that the incorruptible seed was in him. Even when he was an eminent Christian, he was unknown to fame. Perhaps not one in a thousand of all who shall read these lines ever heard of him before. It was by the merest accident that I first heard of him, from one who resides hundreds of miles from Mercer, but who once happened to pass through that place. I greatly like a saying ascribed to the late Rev. Dr. Rodgers, of New York: "Should I ever reach the kingdom of heaven, three things will greatly surprise me. One will be, that I shall find many wanting, of whose piety when on earth I never doubted. Another will be, that I shall find many there, in whose piety, when on earth, I had little or no confidence. The greatest wonder of all will be, to find myself there."

5. Could we see an eminent servant of Christ in every neighbourhood, we might hope the best things for our country. As a man, as a magistrate, as an elder, as a peace-maker, as a living pattern of piety, what a blessing was Joseph Smith! God's people are still "the salt of the earth and the light of the world." How much good may one man of the right spirit do! How terribly does his example reprove wickedness! How powerfully do his life and conversation allure to piety! No mere officer of the law can spread such peace in a community as he whose dignified example and Christian spirit invite to virtue. The wicked may hate, slander, and persecute him; but when difficulties arise, how all resort to him, and in times of affliction and religious awakening, how will even his maligners beg his prayers and seek his counsel! They know he is right, even when they mock and belie him. But when a man combines office, intelligence, piety, and age, and uses all for God, how unspeakable his value to any people! Such a man is a strong rod, a pillar.

6. To be a servant of Christ is as wise as it is obligatory. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." The grace of God bringeth salvation. Even on earth, the servants of

God are cared for as none others are. If Moses spends forty days or nights in the mountain without bread or water, still he is conversing with God, and when he comes down he is not faint. His countenance shines with an intolerable brightness. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Toil, strife, sorrow will soon end, and then will come heaven, infinite, eternal, glorious. No man is wise who is not wise for eternity. He who wins heaven cannot die a fool.

7. If the present lamentable want of humble, zealous, successful ministers, and of promising candidates for the sacred office is to be supplied, there must be a return to solemn, earnest family instruction, and parents must devote their sons to this service with joyfulness, if God call them thereto. Fathers, mothers, lay this thing to heart. Pray over it. The cry for help is loud, and long, and piteous. Will you withhold the best you have from such a cause? Let your infant sons be solemnly devoted to God in any service for which he shall fit them. I have been credibly informed of a poor woman who, on returning from a missionary meeting some twenty years ago, wept that she had no money to give to so blessed a cause. She searched her humble dwelling, to see if she could find nothing that could be converted into money; but her quest was vain. She went to the loft of her cabin, she wept, she prayed; she remembered her children; she devoted them to God and to this work. She never forgot that solemn act. Neither did God. Her children grew up, and several of them are already teaching the heathen the right ways of God. Think of pious Hannah and her Samuel of old. See how God blessed the mother of Samuel J. Mills. Give all to God, even an only son. God had an only begotten Son. He gave him up for us. "Be ye followers [imitators] of God."

8. How rich, and free, and efficacious is the grace of God! It is just what we sinners need. The plan of salvation suits us in all respects.

While grace is offered to the prince,
The poor may take their share;
No mortal has a just pretence
To perish in despair.

The gospel brings mercy to the little child in its feebleness, to the young man in his strength, and to the old man in his decrepitude. It offers pardon to the guilty, righteousness to

the naked, purification to the vile, wisdom to the foolish, life to the perishing. Christ succours the tempted, restores the wandering, supports the weak, cheers the disconsolate, guides the doubtful, gives victory in death, and opens the portals of heaven to the redeemed.

Blessed Saviour! Thou art worthy. Thou art worthy to wear the crown and wield the sceptre of an empire absolutely universal. Thou art worthy of all the love and honour and songs of men and angels. Men may call thy gospel foolishness and weakness, but "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Thy "gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Whatever we do, let us do all to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved.

Reader! have you accepted that grace? Is Christ all your hope and all your salvation? If you die without his grace, it had been good for you that you had never been born.