

Happy faith

and

assurance

in death

“He is always...in a permanently
devout frame of spirit, and such
as I should wish to have in my
last moment”



James Stewart

The Second Reformation period in Scotland witnessed many eminently godly lives. Some of these were prominent in society among the nobility. Sir Thomas Steuart of Kirkfield and Coltness (1631–1698) and his wife Margaret and their wider family were of such.

The Coltness Family

The father of Sir Thomas was Sir James Steuart of Kirkfield (1608 – 1681). A prominent leader and elder amongst the Covenanters, he held political office in the 1640s and 1650s. He was an earnest Christian and kept a Bible in every room of his large home. A staunch Covenanter, he was dismissed from office at the Restoration of 1660. He suffered by being twice imprisoned and heavily fined for no just cause.

Sir James was a close friend of many leading Covenanters. George Gillespie (1613-1648) praised his piety in a pun on his success as a banker.

“Sir James Stewart has more sterling religion in ready cash than any man ever I knew. He is always agreeably composed and recollected, in a permanently devout frame of spirit, and such as I should wish to have in my last moment”

Thomas Steuart was said to be a child “sanctified as from the womb”. During the plague of 1645 in Edinburgh he and another youth were thought to have become infected. Thomas encouraged his companion to trust Christ and they both went to

their knees and joined in “most solemn prayer” with “much spiritual comfort”. In due course they were found to be without contamination and released from confinement.

In 1655-1656 he worked with his father to build the parish kirk of Coltness in a more central location. His younger brother, Sir James Steuart of Goodtrees was an advocate and author of the book *Naphtali*. This book described and defended the struggles of the Covenanters.

Thomas was to keep himself free from conforming to the State’s claimed supremacy over the Church during the times of persecution. In 1683 he was banished from Scotland and his estate seized. This was because he had assisted some of the Covenanters who fought at Bothwell Bridge in 1679.

In Holland he was forced to flee from place to place when he was tracked down by Government spies. Yet he could testify “that, according to the number of the trials and the burden and heat of the day, so was patience, strength and consolation afforded”. During this period he found great comfort and help from Psalm 107 as a song of thanksgiving for the good Providence of God.

Thomas and Margaret had nine sons and three daughters. One of these, John was remarkable as a child of grace though he died at only 10 years of age. It was said that he “gave solid convincing marks of the life and work of the Spirit of all grace on his soul”. “He was a gracious experienced

Christian by the distinguishing grace of heaven”. His words in dying were recorded and widely distributed. His mother’s own last words below refer to this. The language is slightly updated.

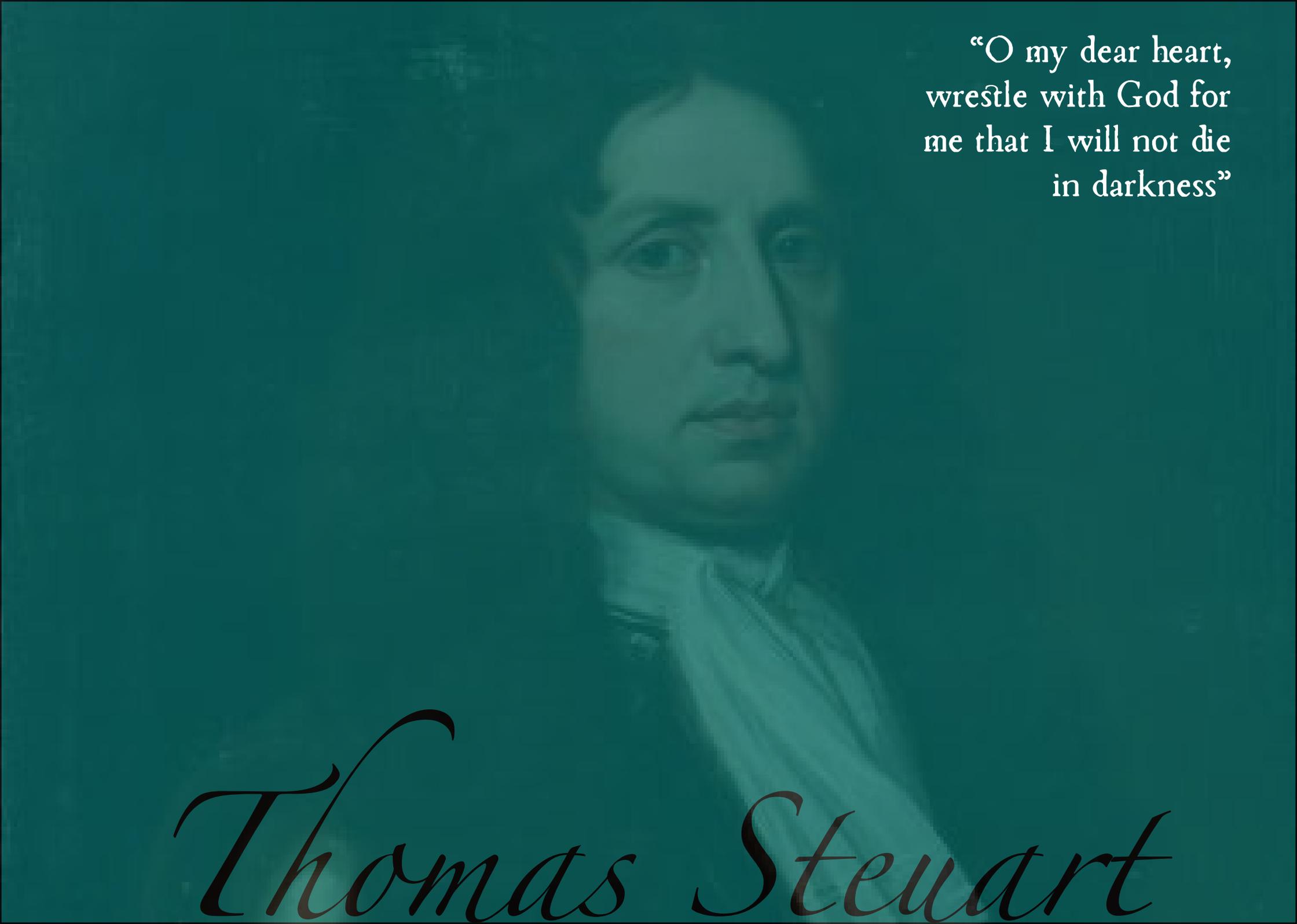
Lady Coltness

The following account of the last words of Lady Coltness is both moving and edifying. It was said that “she had been a saint indeed all her life long, but she finished her course gloriously”.

Sir Thomas wrote in his diary that the “dying words of my glorified dear are in many good Christian hands”. He noted that her dying words and those of her son John “by God’s blessing have been edifying and confirming and comforting to many”. He was comforted by their good effect upon those “careless and thoughtless in matters of religious concerns.”

Sir Thomas also speaks of Bethels in the woods and other secluded places where he could pour out his heart in prayer. His prayers were full of submission to God’s will and thanksgiving for the assurance she expressed in dying.

**“Never did any end their days
with more distinguishing
marks of a divine work of
happy faith and assurance”**



“O my dear heart,
wrestle with God for
me that I will not die
in darkness”

Thomas Stewart

We all need to make preparation for death. Here is an account of someone who died well. She died happy because she died in faith and hope.

Fears in the face of death

Margaret gave birth to her twelfth child on the 27th of May, 1675. During the next three days it seemed likely that she would recover. Yet on the fourth day she developed a fever and expressed fears to her husband about her illness.

She also spoke about the concerns of her soul and begged him to remember her condition to the Lord. She asked him for the Lord's sake not to insist that the Lord should spare her life. "I do not desire to live yet pray that I will not die in darkness about the true condition of my soul".

"The Lord has often heard you in praying for deliverances to come to me when I have been past all hope and He has given me to you. Now I beg for this, that the Lord would be with me by His power and grace through this sickness. If He leaves me in this cloud yet I will not doubt that the many gracious manifestations of Himself that I have had are real. He has made me sincerely to submit and heartily give myself up to Him. I dare not nor will not deny His gracious work. But O my dear heart, wrestle with God for me that I will not die in darkness."

She wept and said: "Do not pray for my life, for you will be disappointed". "The devil is busy with me, tempting me strongly. He is saying: 'All you had were

mere flashes. You were nothing but a hypocrite, formal in all that you did and careless'. O too true. Yet the Lord knows my sincerity though with weakness, which I hope He has accepted."

Prayer in the face of death

Her fever was only evident to a small extent. Everyone concluded that her anxiety about her soul's condition strongly aggravated it. She was in constant spiritual exercise. She was continually praying with great confession and whispering "for contrition, contrition, contrition!"

Two ministers, Mr William Vilant and Mr John Inglis came in to visit her. They commended the great and unspeakable grace of God and Christ revealed in the gospel to poor lost sinners. After they were gone she called for her husband. She said, "Blessed be God. I never heard anything more refreshing and of more power and weight."

But the next day her illness increased and she cried out to her husband. "O, O! for assurance, if God would grant it to a poor sinner that is longing and crying for it and looking to Him for it!" She expressed this vehemently.

Her husband answered: "My dear, was Christ not always your choice and preferable to all things? Do you dare to say before God that He was not so to you and that He has determined you to make Him your choice?"

She cried out very fervently. "O He always was so,

He always was so to me, more desirable to me than riches, honours, pleasures, crowns and all things! Lord, thou knowest. Whom have I in heaven but thee or on earth whom I desire besides thee? O that I were with thee, where I shall sin and doubt no more, where the weary are at rest!"

These words prompted a worthy Christian to say to her husband: "Can you say that you ever heard her doubt after those words?" Indeed, she did not.

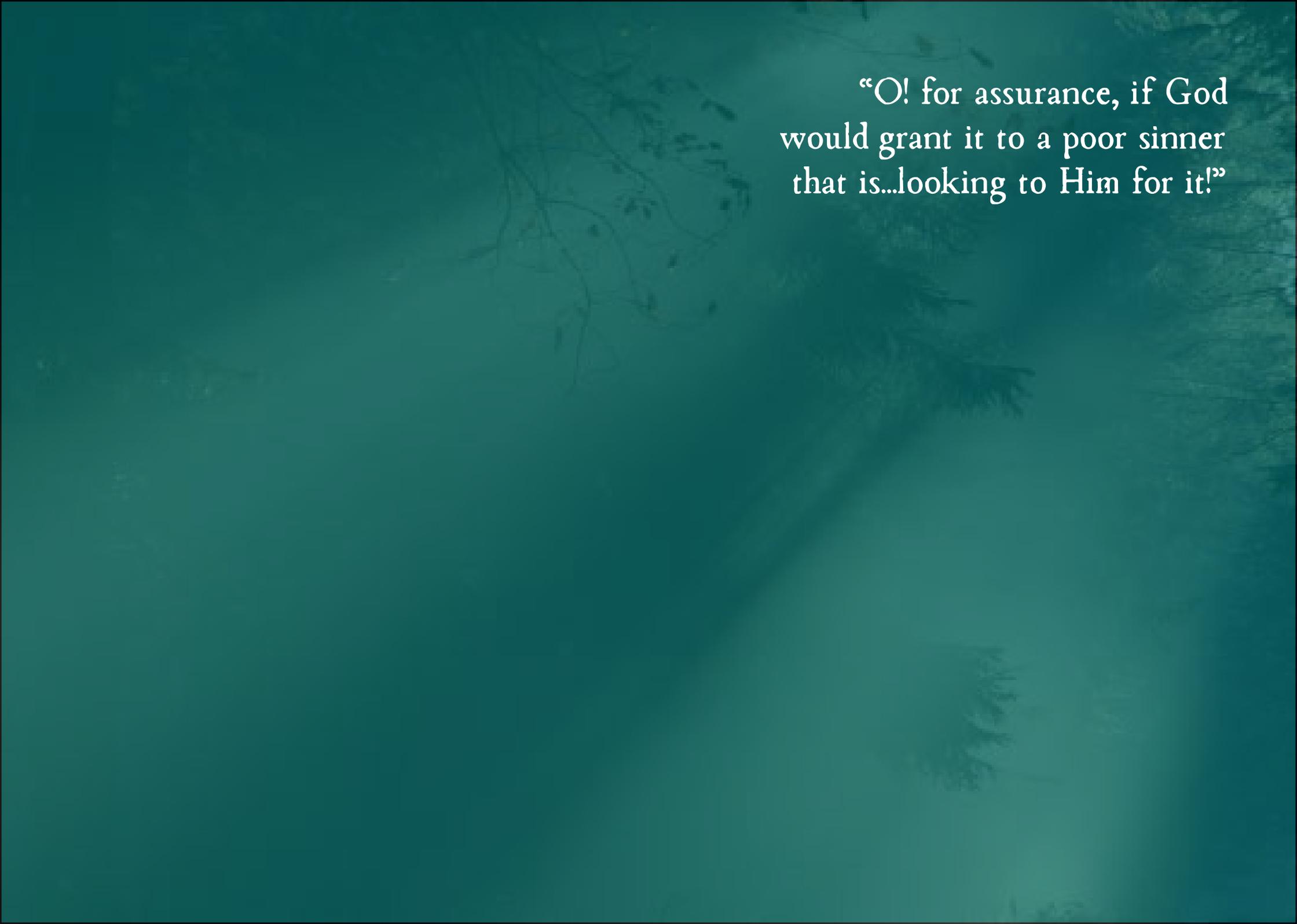
The next day she was heard praying for a long time with fervour of spirit. Towards the end she breathed out these words:

"Lord, thou who appeared so wonderfully to my son Johnie who was only ten years of age. All those who saw or heard him and witnessed his death were amazed. Lord, Lord! appear to me. Oh! it was true that he was only a child. He did not know what sin was nor could sin as I have done who am a thirty-seven year old sinner. But Lord, on those whom thou settest thy love, sin will be no obstacle in the way. Lord, Lord, appear to me."

Assurance in the face of death

The account would be long indeed if all that she spoke of this nature during her illness was recorded. All her words were full of grace.

The night before her death she began to perspire in the midst of the fever. This continued for about eight or nine hours and everyone hoped that this would cool the fever. Although she was a little refreshed



“O! for assurance, if God
would grant it to a poor sinner
that is...looking to Him for it!”

by this she still said that it was pointless to expect her to recover. She heard the doctor and others who were present say that her condition was not as dangerous as she believed.

She then called for her husband, and said: "My dear, you will be disappointed. Leave me, leave me, for I have left you and all my children, and all the world. I long, I long to be with Him." The doctor said: "Would you not willingly stay with your husband and children if it were the Lord's will?" She answered: "I could submit to His will. But Oh! I long, long to be with Him, that is better than all".

Then lifting up both her hands she said, "Now, O my Lord! I come unto thee. Thou knowest that in my health I sought thee albeit with great weakness yet with a sincere heart. Thou knowest how often, often have I given myself up to thee with my soul and heart? Now I have nothing to look to in myself, but to thy free love, and to thy free grace. O free, free love! I look, look, look to this for mercy. I look to thy righteousness, that imputed righteousness. I look to that satisfaction offered at Jerusalem for sinners. Thy blood cries for better things than that of Abel. O blessed imputed righteousness! O blessed satisfaction! I renounce my own righteousness, it is all as rotten rags. Lord, I come unto thee. Thou hast said, 'All that come unto me, I will in no wise cast out.' O, O, O! free love! Though one might dare to die for a righteous man, yet our Lord died for his enemies. O wonderful love! Lord, thou that knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee, I must not let go my hold of thee now."

"Oh! I long, long to be with Him, that is better than all"

She persisted for a long time with similar expressions commending free grace. She spoke with such fervency that it was as if her spirit would have gone out with her words. She reached out her arms and grasped with her hands as if she had seen Christ. She cried out: "I believe that Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the Father as really as that I am lying here."

Afterwards lying quietly for a while she was heard saying: "Lord, thou hast given me twelve children. The third child I gave unto thee and thou tookest him (this was John). My seventh child I gave unto thee, and thou tookest him and his sister also (Harry and Margaret). I have given my twelfth child unto the Lord. The Lord bless him. I have given all my children unto the Lord as soon as they were born, and long before they were born. I have desired only two things from the Lord for them. First, that they may fear Him and that He may put His image on them. Second, I never sought riches or honour for them. I sought only that the Lord would in His good providence give them employment and callings. Thus they would live honestly and not be burdensome to friends."

Those around her urged her to be silent and take rest when they heard her being able to speak without difficulty. They still hoped that she might recover. She raised her voice and said: "Sirs, can you believe what I am going to tell you? This night

I will be with my son Johnie." "Fy upon me! fy upon me! Why am I saying this about my son Johnie? This night I will be with my God and my Lord Jesus and that holy and glorious company."

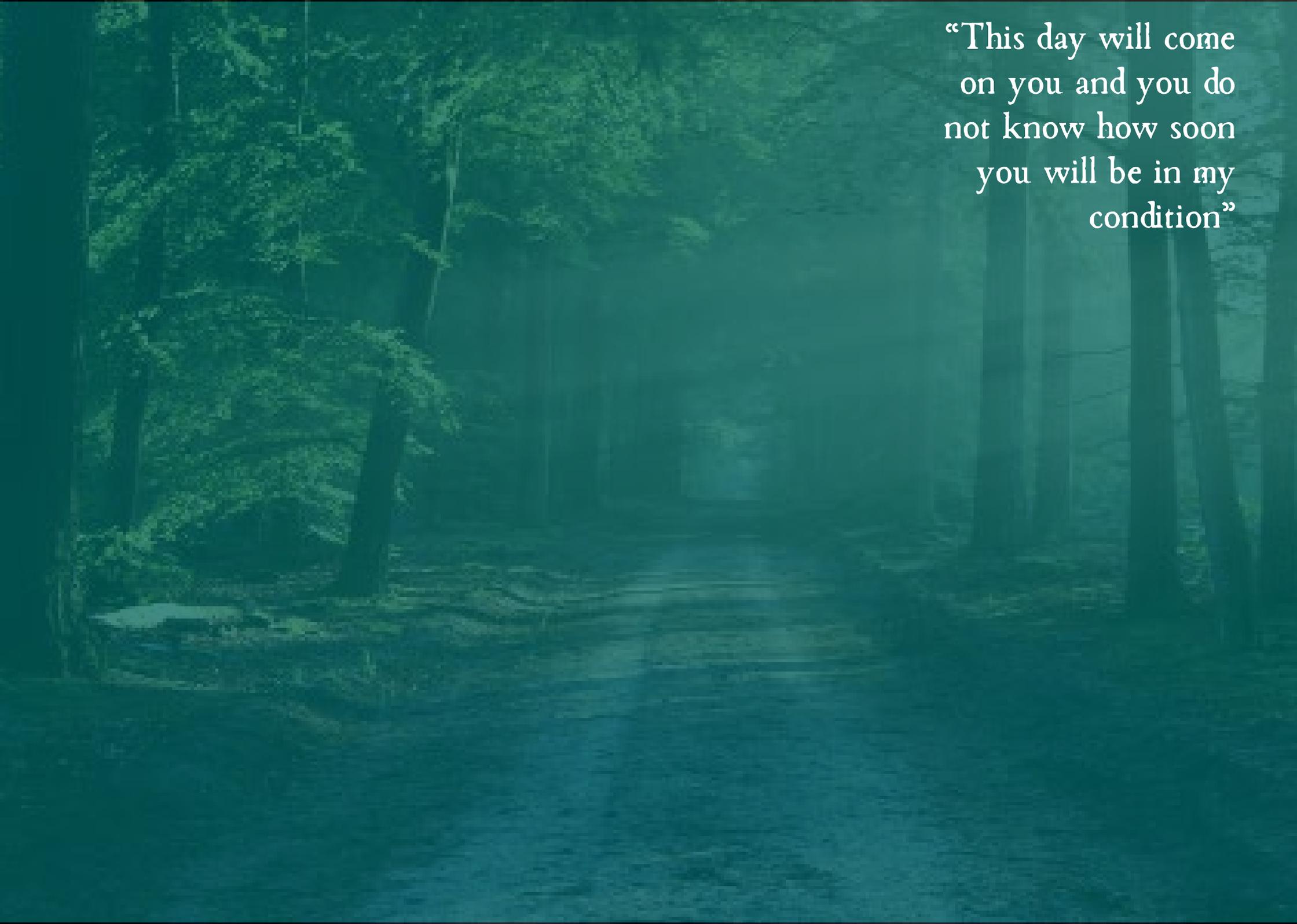
She was not delirious yet sometimes a few harmless and innocent words were uttered during her sleep. Her most frequent words were: "Lord help, help Lord, leave me not now, keep that which I have committed unto thee."

After this she said again that her end was near and assured those present that this would be so. It was not possible to believe that it was so near since there was no outward sign of it.

Many were hopeful when they heard her say to the doctor, "For all this my head is well, and I find my heart whole." She was urged to sleep and not waste her weak and wearied spirit. She refused saying, "Shall I sleep now when I am going to die? Lord forgive you all. I assure you, if I fall asleep, I will never come out of it again". This was verified within only a few hours time.

At the same time she said to her husband, "My dear, you will be surprised." Then she added with more earnestness to the rest: "Would you hinder me from speaking now, when I have not more than an hour to speak in this world?" One who heard this took out his watch and showed it to some standing nearby. They all said that it later happened just as she had foretold.

The fact that she had little or no pain made many hopeful. They begged her again to rest. She said with a clear voice: "Sirs, I tell you, that this night when

A dark, misty forest path with a quote overlaid in the top right corner. The path is narrow and leads into the distance, flanked by tall, thin trees. The atmosphere is somber and mysterious, with a heavy mist or fog obscuring the background. The quote is written in a white, serif font, centered in the upper right quadrant of the image.

“This day will come
on you and you do
not know how soon
you will be in my
condition”

your sun goes down my sun will arise and never go down. Your sun will both arise and set upon you, but my sun will never go down. O bright morning star!”

Counsel in the face of death

After this, she raised herself up to speak to her children and relatives. She did this as if she had no illness but was going to do something as a healthy person. Asking for some rose water and vinegar she said: “Let me refresh my weak spirits for what I have to do”. She then washed her temples and face with her own hands and breathed some vinegar into her nose.

After asking everyone to go out of the room except her husband and children she spoke to those of her children who had reached adulthood one by one.

She referred to their natural dispositions. They were urged to pray and guard against sins they might be afraid of being inclined towards. She spoke to each of them specially and appropriately. It was said with such grace by the Spirit of grace that we hope they always remembered it and avoided the faults mentioned. She spoke to them about Christian duties and sought to persuade them with many godly reasons. She warned them against many sins and evils with great authority.

She commanded them to abstain from vain company and abhor the evils of such a profane generation. They were commanded to guard against all uncleanness and falsehood. They were urged to hold fast to the instruction they had received.

“Though you have not fallen into outward pollutions that is nothing. Let him that stands take heed lest he fall”.

She warned them to beware of all lying and sinful evasion and equivocation. They must not depart from God and return with the dog to his vomit and the sow to its puddle. “I say to you before the Lord. God will set your sins in order before you. You will see them in the great day of the Lord as clearly set before you as the light that shines.”

She warned them in relation to their studies. “Be afraid lest learning and philosophy may make you become atheists or irreligious as it has others. What is all the greatness and all the learning in the world without grace? Remember that ‘Not many noble, not many mighty, not many wise are called’. I do not say this to discourage you from reading and learning but do not let it make you neglect your duty”.

“I charge you before God and as you would wish meet with me again with happiness. Be diligent in reading the Scriptures and in prayer. Do not be satisfied with your morning and evening prayers. I charge you in the sight and presence of the Lord not to judge your religion to be true and sincere, if it does not take you any further than morning and evening prayers”.

“In all these things, I say to you, I will be a witness against you. Do not consider what I say now to be the same as instruction and reproof at any other time. The words I have spoken are the words of a dying mother. I pray to the Lord that you may never

forget them.

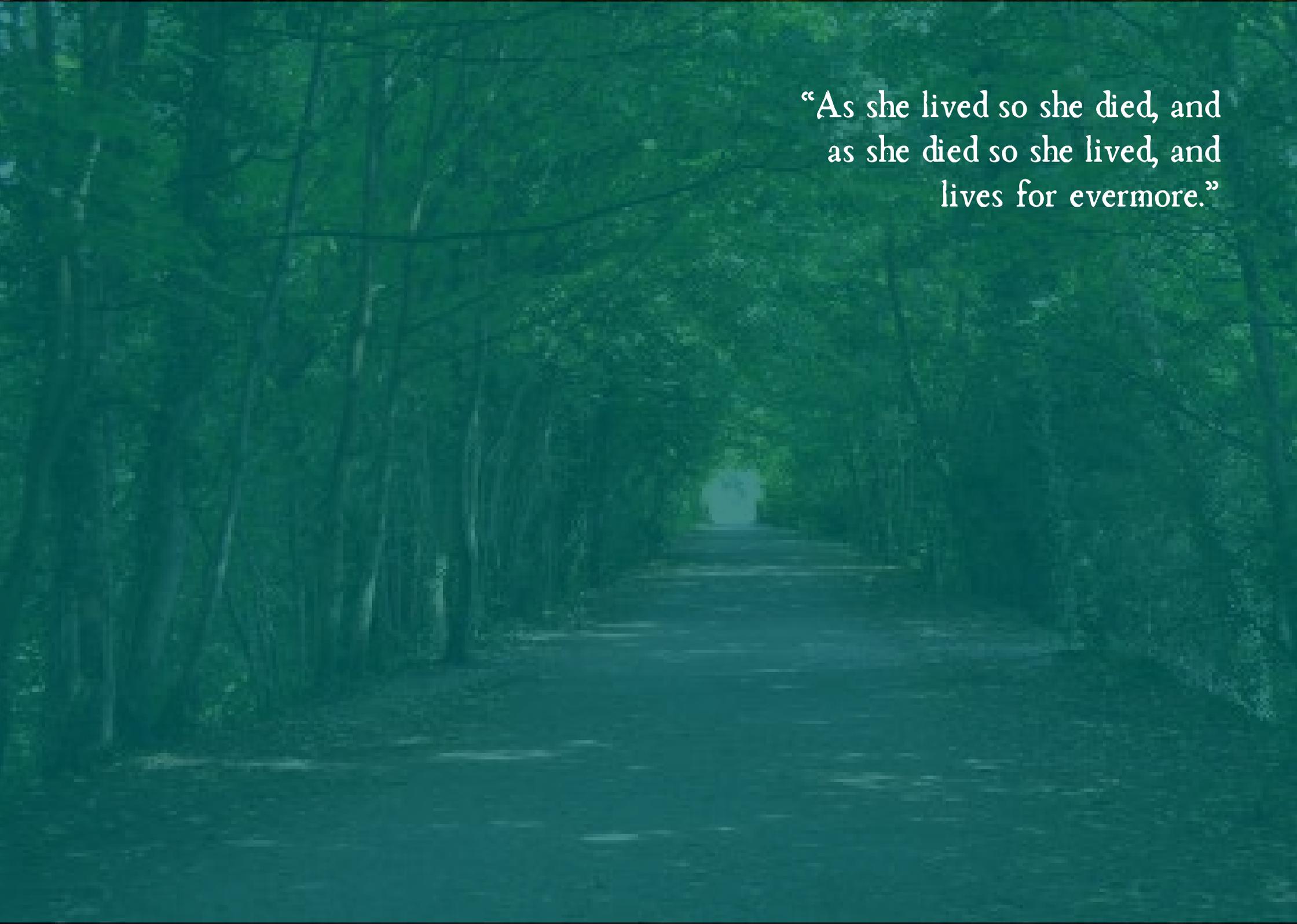
If you keep and practice them, God’s blessing will be upon you and I leave you my blessing. If you do not do them but allow yourselves to do that which is in the least way displeasing to God. If you turn away from Him, the curse of the everlasting God will fall upon your heads, and the curse of your dying mother will rest on you. If you will obey and follow the Lord, the blessings of the everlasting God, the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the blessings of your dying mother will be upon your heads.”

She then added: “I have good hopes about you”. She removed her hand from their heads where it had been while she blessed them. Thus she parted from them, kissing and blessing them.

Ministers and others who have heard this account have wondered at such great zeal for God. Her natural affection to her children was always entirely loving and tender. Yet in spite of this she gave them a fearful curse if they would forsake God. This is like the example of Moses (see Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28).

After this she spoke very tenderly to her husband. She said that he had been a dear and kind husband to her. She urged him to part with her freely. Then she also gave him much advice about the children. She desired that he would encourage them in the fear of the Lord.

Then she called for her mother and four sisters who were all present. They were given much serious



“As she lived so she died, and
as she died so she lived, and
lives for evermore.”

instruction and counsel. It was given with holy prudence and discretion. It was suited to their inclinations and conditions, both married and unmarried. She thanked them all for their help to her and asked forgiveness for the trouble she had given them. She exhorted them to holy diligence in praying and reading the Scriptures. They were entreated to guard against all sin, even the smallest sin. She corrected herself for this saying: “The Lord forgive me for calling any sin small, for there is no small sin. Every sin deserves everlasting wrath.”

They should not set their heart too much on any earthly pleasure. They did not know when the Lord might take it from them. They were entreated to make good use of their time. “This day will come on you and you do not know how soon you will be in my condition.” She bade them farewell with many earnest blessings. There was such mutual embrace, tenderness and tears as cannot be expressed. With great sweetness and meekness she ended her farewell with these words: “Now I urge you be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another. And be of one mind, and live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

In all these things she appeared not in the least affected by pain or sickness, so that no one but herself could imagine her time to be so near.

Peace in the face of death

After this she said, “I have sought the Lord many times that death might not take me by surprise and it has not. I have also prayed that death might

not be terrifying to me and this is also not the case. I have also sought that in dying I may not cause others to fear”. The Lord granted this too. To show her great composure of mind, she also gave orders about several small matters concerning her death and burial.

Now very weak, she called for her father-in-law, and putting out her hand to him, said: “Hold my hand, for I cannot hold yours”. She then added: “You have been a very kind father to me, a very kind affectionate father to me. I cannot say any more, but the Lord reward you.”

Then, turning to her other relations, she took leave of them. She said to Allanton’s brother, with whose wife her daughters were at the time, “Sir, tell my two lasses that I remembered them, and charged them to diligently seek and serve the Lord, and make conscience of reading the Scriptures; and the Lord’s blessing be upon them.” And so she took leave of him, desiring him, that he would remember her to his worthy wife. After this she called for the young man responsible for the children and said to him, “Mr William, you have a great responsibility now both of the bodies and souls of the children. My husband will be taken up with his affairs, and I fear shall not be long behind me.”

Then she said, “I have nothing now only one thing to do”. Turning to her husband she continued: “My dear, you have been a dear husband to me, but I am going to a dearer. I urge you not to weep for me, I will be better. Leave me, leave me. Now, my dear, surrender my soul to God.” Her husband in great grief

said: “My dear, I dare not and cannot. The minister will do it.” She responded calmly: “Let the minister pray”. After he prayed she said to her husband again: “My dear, surrender my soul to God. You must do it, you must do it, and leave me. I have surrendered my soul to God already. I got it from God and I have given it back to Him again.”

So her husband obeyed her and surrendered her solemnly. He was greatly helped by God to do this. She held up her weak hands during the whole time. Those who observed were greatly moved since after he prayed she embraced him with both her arms about the neck, until through weakness they fell down.

After this she fell asleep. She was heard quietly to breathe out these words quietly, “O tender High Priest, keep that which I have committed unto thee”. She died in the Lord very peacefully, without either shiver or sob. It was precisely when the sun was going down as she had foretold. While they were shutting her eyes some remembered her words and ran to the window. They said that a part of the sun was just setting and sinking out of sight. Another person who had not been present to hear her words but heard the cry at her death, came in and said that it was at the same time.

She lived for thirty seven years, five months, and eight days. Her short course came to a gracious and glorious close. Yet her life was also commendable.

As she lived so she died, and as she died so she lived, and lives for evermore.

“to promote the restoration of the Christian Church in Scotland, by informing, educating and promoting understanding of the attainments of the Second Reformation in Scotland”

Reformation Scotland Trust



The Second Reformation was a period of radical reformation and rediscovery of Biblical truth in the Church of Scotland. It was also the period of greatest revival throughout the whole nation that Scotland has ever experienced.

We aim to promote the biblical understanding attained at that time.

The attainments of this period were covenanted uniformity in doctrine, worship and church government.

This includes the biblical standards for faith and worship produced by the Westminster Assembly.

Amongst these is the Westminster Confession of Faith, the doctrinal standard of the Scottish Presbyterian Church.

We are convinced that the Christian Church in Scotland needs to repent and re-engage with these teachings once more. In doing so it will discover God's blessing on obedience to His truth.

The Biblical truths reclaimed in the Second Reformation are the only safe foundation for the future of the Scottish Church.

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