

Death

The certain *Wages of Sin*
to the Impenitent:

Life

The sure *Reward of Grace*
to the Penitent:

Together with the only *Way* for

YOUTH

To avoid the former, and attain
the latter.

Deliver'd in three **Lecture Sermons** ;
Occasioned by the *Imprisonment, Con-
demnation and Execution*, of a Young
Woman, who was guilty of Murdering
her Infant begotten in Whoredom.

To which is added,
An *Account* of her manner of *Life & Death*,
in which the *Glory of free Grace* is displayed.

By Mr. **John Rogers**, Pastor of
the Church of *Ipswich*.

I Tim. 1. 16

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[ESTHER RODGERS]

*The Declaration & Confession of
Esther Rodgers*

[1701]

Reader;

This Serves only to draw the Curtain, that thou mayst behold a Tragick Scene, strangely changed into a Theater of Mercy, a Pillar of Salt Transformed into a Monument of Free Grace; a poor Wretch, entering into Prison a Bloody Malefactor, her Conscience laden with Sins of a Scarlet Die, but there by the Gracious and Powerful, but various workings: first of the Spirit of Bondage, then of Adoption; the space of Eight Months she came forth, Sprinkled, Cleansed, Comforted, a Candidate of Heaven.

Whilst she was under Confinement, after she had conceived in her self good Hope of finding Mercy with God, through Christ, she was ready to give a reason of her hope, to such as were Serious and Pious, with Meekness, and much affection. And truly the Reasons and Grounds she went upon were Scriptural, and so able to bear the weight she put upon them; (which Hope the result of her Faith) kept her Company to the last, and failed her not, when she had most need of it. When she walked the dolorous way to the place of her Execution, and approaching near to it, after a little Reluctancy of the Flesh, as soon as she ascended to behold the fatal Tree, her Faith, and courage revived, and she lift up her Feet, and Marched on with an Erected, and Radiant Countenance, as unconcerned with the business of Death, at once out doing all the old Roman Masculine bravery, and shewing what Grace can do, in, and for the Weaker Sex; and this in Presence of a Multitude of Spectators, of whom this Relator was One, and an Admiring Observer: All which is to be Ascribed, Firstly, To the Infinitely Rich, and Free Grace of God; but Ministerially, and Instrumentally to the Labours, Prayers and Endeavours of the Reverend Elders of the Church of Ipswich, and many other good Christians there; after her Apprehension in Newbury where the Fact was Committed.

She was Conveyed, (and it was happy for her) that she was Conveyed to the Prison in Ipswich; where are to be found, (A Nation) Pardon the Expression, Of Sound, Serious and Praying Christians, who made Incessant Prayers to Heaven in her behalf. Praying not only for her, but with her, in their own Houses, joyning & turning their Private Meetings into whole days of Fasting and Prayer; and continuing till the Stars appearing: Yea, by Turns in the Prison also. So turning a Den of Thieves, (to use Dr. Wilds words) into a House of Prayer; and had there been some Thief there, (for I know not who was there) he might Perhaps, with her, been sharer of the benefit. Their Worthy Pastor also, took constant & unwearied pains, Plying the Oar, To waft over her Soul to Heaven; and saw the fruit of all his Labours, and Travels with her, through the Blessing of God, Namely a great & gracious change wrought in her, which she Humbly, Affectionately, and Thankfully acknowledged.

And now, Let the Great God of Heaven, have all the Praise & Glory of this Action: And let that unhappy Tree; indeed happy in this, that the first that Suffered on it, was (we trust) Fruit Consecrated: But if it be the Will of God, that there may never be Occasion again to make use of it to such Fatal purposes, but only stand as a Buoy, or Seamark, to point out the Rocks and Shelves, where she Shipwrackt her honour; and that all others may HEAR & FEAR, &c. Which is the Desire and Prayer of,

Your Servant in the Lord,
SAMUEL BELCHER.

The Declaration & Confession
of
Esther Rodgers,
Of Kittery in the Province of Main,
in New England, Single woman.

I was born at Kittery sometime in May, 1680. At the Age of Thirteen came to live as an Apprentice to Mr. Joseph Woodbridge of Newbury. Had little or no thoughts of God or Religion, though Living in a Religious Family; was taught to Read, Learned Mr. Cottons Catechism, and had frequent opportunities of going to Publick Meetings; but was a careless Observer of Sabbaths, and Hearer of Sermons; no Word that ever I heard or read making any Impression upon my Heart, (as I Remember) Neither did I at all give my self to Secret Prayer, or any other Duty that concerned the Salvation of my Soul. And because I thus neglected God, refused his Counsil, and would not walk in his Ways, therefore he justly gave me up to my own hearts Lusts, and ways of Wickedness.

About the Age of Seventeen, I was left to fall into that foul Sin of Uncleanness, suffering my self to be defiled by a Negro Lad living in the same House. After I perceived that I was with Child, I meditated how to prevent coming to Publick Shame; Satan presently setting in with his Temptation, I soon complied and resolved to Murder the Child, if ever I should have one born alive: and continued in my wicked purpose all along, till I had the fatal Opportunity of putting it into Execution. Being delivered of a Living Child, I used means presently to stop the breath of it, and kept it hid in an upper Room, till the Darkness of the Night following, gave advantage for a Private Burial in the Garden.

All this was done in Secret, no person living whatsoever, no not so much as the Father of the child himself was privy to my disposal of it, or knew that I ever had such a Child.

Afterwards reflecting on what I had done, was followed with some Awakening, Frights and Convictions during my abode at Mr. Woodbridges, which was about half a year. Yet, never making any serious Address to God for pardon of these my great and hainous Sins. But thence I went to Piscatequa, where I lived in a publick House, and soon got over and rid of all my Fears, and even all thoughts thereof, giving my self up to other wicked Company and ways of Evil.

About a year after, I returned to Newbury to Mr. Joseph Woodbridges again, where my former Sins came fresh to Remembrance, and troubled me a while; which together with other reasons, occasioned my Removal to another place in the Town. But there also I took all Opportunities to follow my old Trade of running out a Nights, or entertaining my Sinful Companions in a back part of the House. And there I fell into the like horrible Pit (as before) viz. of Carnal Pollution with the Negro man belonging to that House. And being with Child again, I was in as great concern to know how to hide this as the former. Yet did not so soon resolve the Murdering of it, but was continually hurried in my thoughts, and undetermined till the last hour. I went forth to be delivered in the Field, and dropping my Child by the side of a little Pond, (whether alive, or still Born I cannot tell) I covered it over with Dirt and Snow, and speedily returned home again. But being Suspected and Examined, about having had a Child since my going out, made little or no answer (that I remember) till the next Morning. The Child being found by some Neighbours was brought in, & laid before my Face, to my horrible Shame & Terror; under which Confusion I remained during my Confinement at Newbury, being about one Month, Thinking only of the punishment I was like to suffer, without any true concernedness as to my Sins against God, or the State of my Immortal Soul; till some time after I came into Ipswich Prison; when and where it pleased the Great and

Gracious God to work upon my heart, as in the following Relation I have given account of.

A Relation of her Experience, both of some Conviction and Comfort received in the Prison: Communicated to a certain Gentlewoman of the Town, with whom she was very free, before and afterwards.

Taken word for word from her
own Mouth.

The first time Mr. Rogers came to see me; after much other Discourse, he told me of the odiousness of Sin; and that if ever I came to be sensible of it, I should loath it, and not because of my own punishment procured thereby, but because of the Dishonour done to God. Then after he was gone, I began to think that I never loathed Sin so as yet, and was in a dreadful Case indeed; to think what a wretched Condition I had brought my self into, and had dishonoured God: insomuch that I could not Rest, I was so dreadfully hurried; and Satan made me believe that it was impossible such a Sinner, should be Saved. And I could not Read, nor Sleep, nor have any Rest night nor day. After a while God made me to think that it was Satans Temptation to keep me from Repentance: But if I could Repent and Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, I might find mercy, although I was such a Sinner. And although I am such a vile Sinner, I hope God has made me sensible of my sins, he has made me to loath my self, and truly to Repent for Sin. God has made me to see that there is nothing that I can do can save me, but that there is a sufficiency in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I do throw my self at his Feet for mercy, and have hope from his promises. *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him Return to the Lord, for he will have mercy on him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* And I do so far as I know my self, Repent of my so great sins against so good a God; for that which has been the delight of my Soul, I do now abominably hate! And again 'tis said, *He that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall find mercy.* I can truly say, I have confessed my Sins before God and man, and do desire truly to Repent for them. *Isa. 1. 18. Come now let us reason together saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* I hope I have hated the evil of my ways; and do hope to have my Soul washed and cleansed in the Blood of Jesus Christ.

During her Imprisonment (which was more than eight months) she was frequently visited by Ministers, and other Christians of the Town and

Neighbourhood, to whom she gave little Encouragement for a considerable time, being very much reserved, partly thro' natural temper, partly by power of Temptation as was judged; that she could not open her mind or condition at all; nor make any other answer to Questions propounded, than yea or no: till after a while she obtained more freedom of spirit, and liberty of speech. Then would she speak of her sins with aggravation, and express sorrow for them with great affection: related the distressing, and almost despairing thoughts of her mind in the time that she kept silence; as that God who had left her to fall so dreadfully into sin, would now leave her to an hard and impenitent heart, that she should be damned; found a great averseness at first, against going to the Publick Assembly on Sabbath and Lecture Dayes, (for which she had liberty twice every week) lest her heart should be more hardned, and her Condemnation more heightened thereby. But it was not long before she found a better fruit and effect of her attendance thereupon: She felt the power of the Word preached, inlightning, convincing, humbling and softning of her heart. Also that the words spoken to her in private made deep and lasting impressions on her Soul: that she began to delight in hearing the Word publick or private; and set her self to search the Scriptures diligently, out of which she collected many Texts, that encouraged her to hope for mercy and pardon, as particularly these, *Prov. 28. 13. Isa. 55[.] I.7.[.] Mat. II. 28, and Isa. I. 18.* on these was her Meditation day & night; and though she professed not to rest on these promises, yet was by them encouraged and drawn to come unto God through Jesus Christ, and to hope in him according to his Word. And having once laid hold on that Hope set before her in the Gospel; she did not, would not, ever after let it go; and tho' she could not so well express the reasons and grounds of her hope, as was desired, yet would not by any means be beaten off from it: and tho' sometimes she felt a sinking fear come upon her, yet that did not long abide. But still said she, my Hopes prevail against my fears; at length all fear was in a manner cast out, and she was even filled with hope, comfort, and joy in believing: Spake very sensibly of the Nature of Faith, which said she, I never understood before, but now I feel the power of it; 'tis quite another thing than most people take it to be, or then I my self did conceive of it. I should at any time before have answered yes to such a Question, *Believest thou to be Saved by Christ?* whereas now I know, that I neither did believe, nor knew I what it was to believe. O Believing is a great and difficult work, 'tis the mighty work of God himself, that any do believe. This was after she had heard a publick Discourse on the Apostles words to the Jaylor, *Acts 16.31.* Having before heard those words of our Saviour, *Mat. 18.3.* spoken to; and being afterwards asked what she thought or experienced about Conversion, said, I am sure there is a great Change, I think a thorow Change wrought in my whole

nature: I now see all things otherwise then I did before; Sin is become very odious, and Christ very precious to me; I see the folly and filthiness of the ways of sin, and in some measure am made to discern the Excellency of Gods ways, and do find more delight and pleasure therein, then ever I did in my former courses. Oh! I can truly say, I loath myself for my sins, I abhor my self; and if I were to live a thousand years in this world, it should be in the hatred of all Evil. Again she said, I would not for all the world be among my sinful Companions, and in the state I then was: I find a thousand times more comfort and delight in the Prison alone, than ever I did with them. When News was carried to her, that her Life was likely to be prolonged near two months by the Courts Adjournment, it rais'd no sudden joy in her, as was expected: and though she could not but wonder at it her self, yet gave this reason for it: I find (said she) a willingness in me to accept the punishment of my sins, and a readiness to glorify the Justice of God by suffering that Death I have deserved, in hope of receiving his mercy to Eternal Life; but I submit to his pleasure. In the time of this Reprieval, she had many opportunities of going to the private Meetings of Christians in the Town, who spent whole days in Prayer with Fasting on her account; and though she joyned not in any Conference with them, yet profest her delight in hearing them, that she found much sweetness in their society, and desired to be gathered with such at Death.

When the time of her Trial came, tho' she would have acknowledged plain matter of Fact, yet could not plead Guilty according to the Form of her Indictment; but being brought in Guilty according to Law and Evidence, of Wilful Murder committed by her, & thereupon being Condemned to Dy, was not at all surprised; but as she before expected, so afterwards approved the Verdict and Sentence, that they were just and right. After Condemnation she was much more free and enlarged in discourse than before: and being often asked, how her Faith and Hope in God and Christ held out; she would answer, without Doubting and Wavering; being askt whether she was never assaulted with Temptations to Unbelief or Fear, since her beginning to hope: Answers, yes at the first, but not lately; neither have I been troubled with terrifying Dreams or Fancies, as formerly I was: nor can I possess my self with fearfulness when I endeavour it by thinking on the most awful circumstances of my Condition and manner of Death which I am to suffer; but in the midst of those thoughts, *Gods comforts delight my Soul*, and I think, that at such times I feel the greatest incomes of joy and sweetness.

On the last Sabbath of her Life on Earth, she presented this Bill to be Read in the Congregation, which was wholly Dictated by her own Mouth, though Written by another hand.

Esther Rodgers *having received a Sentence of Death, which ere long is to be Executed on her Body, being sensible of the just Hand of God for her Great and Crying Sins and Crimes, that she is found guilty of before God; Humbly begs the Prayers of all Gods People in this Congregation for her: being made in some measure sensible of her sad and deplorable Condition, she earnestly begs, that the Lord would still look down in Mercy upon her, to give her Assurance of the Pardon of all her Sins, and to Wash and Cleanse her from, THAT SIN of BLOODGUILTINESS, in the Blood of the Lord JESUS CHRIST; that her Faith and Hope may be only upon the Mercy of God in Christ, for SALVATION: and that the Lord would Strengthen and Uphold her, and carry her through that hard and difficult Work when called thereunto, that she may not be dismayed at the Sight and Fear of DEATH: but that her Mouth may be Opened, and her heart enlarged to declare to Others, what the Lord has done for her Soul, and also to Warn them that are Beholders to take heed by her Example, lest they fall into the like Condemnation.*

The Lord was pleased to make this a good Day unto her, and she was much strengthened and refreshed by what she heard from those words, *Act. 16. 31. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be Saved.* In which discourse, the *Subject, Object, and Principal Act* of true Justifying and Saving Faith, were touched upon: And in the close of all, the extent of the Promise being considered, it was particularly applyed unto *her* upon *Believing*. The Apostle there did not speak to the Jaylour only, but the Charge and Promise both are Universal. "*Let every one believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and Whosoever believeth shall be Saved.*" This was often repeated by our Saviour, particularly unto *Martha*, *Joh. 11. 26. Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never Dy.* Nay further to manifest the Riches of Grace and Power of Faith: He saith, *I am the Resurrection and the Life, He that believeth in me, though he were Dead, yet shall he live.*"

"Here is One in the Congregation at this time, of whom it may be thus spoken, That she is a Dead Woman; not only that she was dead in Trespasses & Sins, but is Dead in Law, and by a Sentence of Condemnation must be put to Death before another Sabbath come about: And yet there is more than a possibility through Grace, that she may Live again; though not in this World, yet for ever in a better, where she shall neither sin nor sorrow more. Who hath begotten thee to such a lively hope, or hope of Eternal life, O thou Dying Malefactor? Has the Spirit of the Lord Jesus wrought this in thee by his Word or no? O Examine (whilst there is Opportunity) thy Hope by thy Faith, and see if that be well grounded on Christ Himself, according to the Word. Not on thine own Prayers, Tears, Humiliations, Sorrows or Repentance, but on the Free Mercy of God, and Merits of Christ alone. If so, it can never rise too high, or will make

ashamed by its fall. Yet must thou continue instant and constant in thy Looking unto this JESUS, who is not only the *Object*, but *Author* and *Finisher* of thy Faith, to establish, strengthen and enable thee to persevere in Faith & Hope to the End; that thou mayst not be found to be one of those who draw back to perdition, but of those that hold out to the Saving of their Souls. Be sensible, that the same Almighty Power which at first enabled thee to believe, is necessary to keep and carry thee through Faith to Salvation. Beg of God to strengthen thee against new Fears, or any Temptations to Unbelief: Say with him, *At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.* And God of his Infinite Grace grant this good Evidence of true Partnership in Jesus Christ both to *thee* and *Us*, viz. That we may hold the beginning of our Confidence stedfast unto the End. *Amen.*" *Heb. 3. 14.*

The Night before her Execution, she said to many coming in at once to visit her: Oh! I have had the joyfulest day to day that ever I had in my whole life. I bless God that ever I came into this Prison. When one of the Company asked her, what she thought of the poor murdered Infants, whom she was instrumental to bring into the world, and then perhaps of sending them to Hell. She answers, I have greatly mourned for my cruelty and wrong to them, as well as Sin against God in all that I have done. Question again; *But how do you think to answer the Cry of their Blood?* *Answ.* I trust I have an Advocate, and many like things.

The next Day (which was appointed for her Execution) being Lecture Day, July 31, 1701. This other Bill was presented by one that took it from her own mouth.

Esther Rodgers a poor Prisoner of Hope, under Sentence of Death, which is in a few hours to take place upon her, being through Gods Grace made sensible of the just hand of God upon her, for her great and crying sins she was found guilty of before God and man: Considering she is upon the Brink of Eternity, which she hopes will be a Blessed Eternity to her; and having a comfortable assurance thereof, thro' Gods infinite mercy in Christ vouchsafed to her so great a Sinner, she humbly begs the Prayers of all Gods People for her, as being the last time she shall enjoy such a benefit here in this world; that the Lord will be pleased to stand by her, and strengthen her, that her Faith and Hope in Christ may hold out to the end; & that her heart may be opened & enlarged to declare to others what God has done for her Soul; and to give warning to those that are Standers by, to take heed of falling unto any such ways and courses, as she has been left unto.

Some time before the Publick Lecture began, the Reverend Mr. *Wise* went in to visit the Prisoner, and began to quacry with her, about her

Spiritual Condition, viz. In what preparation she was for Death, that was now approaching?

Her answer was in expression of much comfort and assurance of her future well being.

In the interim of time came in a Gentlewoman that was her peculiar Visitant, and asked her how she found her self this morning? She answered, her hopes and comfort continued.

Quest. Whether, when her Coffin was brought in, it did not daunt her?

Answ. No, but it rather ministred matter of comfort to me. Then Mr. *Wise* replied to what he heard from her, that if this were real, the effect of a Saving Change upon her heart, she of a poor miserable Malefactor was become one of the greatest Favourites to the King of Heaven. Why *Esther* can you entertain Death, and such terrible Forerunners of it in such Triumph? Then you are very happy: But are you not mistaken? Will you give me leave to make a more exact scrutiny into the State of your Soul? Then pray, be free and plain hearted, that I may have a particular account of your Spiritual State[.] For this she desired Privacy: whereupon the whole Company withdrew: And Mr. *Wise* proceeded in discourse with her after this manner.

Esther, The Godly after Grace is implanted, God is want to order that they pass variety of trials for the proof of the soundness of their State, that Divine Grace in them may grow into greater assurance: So that to put you upon an Examination of this nature, will be no disadvantage to you. Therefore let me have liberty more critically to enquire into the ground of your fore mentioned hopes: I would not at such a time molest your Spiritual quiet, yet you are now within a few hours to appear before a Jealous and Omniscient Judge; you cannot be too curious in settling all things right between Him and your Soul, under the benefit of means. There is no room to err twice in this Adventure. If there be any essential error in your State, and it continues, you are undone for ever. Therefore take my freedom in good part.

Quest. Where are your hopes placed?

Answ. In the Mercy of God, and Merits of Christ.

Quest. You have been a very great Criminal, What sense have you had of Sin? have you seen it exceeding sinful?

Answ. Yes, It has been a greater grief to me that I have offended God, than for what I have, or shall yet endure for my Sin. The time hastens, give me a distinct account of the work of Gods Spirit upon your heart.

This Relation she makes agreeable to the former.

Says she, When I came first into Prison, I was altogether careless,

unaffected and unconcerned about my condition. Mr. *Rogers* came to visit me, and in discourse with me, did so open and lay out my condition before me, in the terrible circumstances and aggravations of it, that I was smitten in my heart, and filled with terrible thoughts about it. He told me also I must seek to God to do all for me that I needed to have done. That I could not mend my heart no more than make it, &c. The trouble of my mind continued upon me, and All the Sins of my Life came to my Remembrance: I fell into great horrors, and was in great distress & perplexity about my condition: I saw my self in a very miserable State by reason of Sin, and the Justice of God. I had very great and sore Conflicts in my Spirit, and many great Temptations. But it pleased God after some time to come in with much Comfort into my Soul, by many precious Promises, as that in *Ezek. 18. 32. I have no pleasure in the Death of him that Dyeth, saith the Lord God, wherefore Turn your selves and live ye;* and others that have been already mentioned. The Peace and Comfort of my mind, (*said she*) is great and continued: When I think of my Sins they disappear, and fly from me, I many times have endeavoured to terrify my self with the thoughts of Death, and my Execution, it seems rather a matter of comfort than terror to me. At times my spirit has been somewhat damped, but my comfort and peace return. Mr. *Wise* further quæried with her about the sense she had of indwelling sin: And by her answers she did discover a considerable knowledge of the Mystery in Christianity; that though she was well confirmed (by the beams of Divine Favour) of the compleatness of her Justification, yet did discern that her Sanctification was incompleat from the sense of heart Evils, Darkness, Wandrings, under sacred means, and vain imaginations &c.

To make some Tryal of the Firmness and manner of her Faith, 'Twas quæried,

Whether she found it hard to believe?

Ans. Yes, But yet she desired to roul [sic] her self upon the Mercy of God, for He had said, *Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you Rest.*

Hereupon, the Minister gives her his charitable Opinion of her good Estate, of which he had a peculiar esteem from the Account she had given him, that the special instrumental cause of her Awakening and Comfort, was an Ambassador of Jesus Christ. So having Recommended her condition to the God of all Grace and Consolation by Prayer, repaired to the Publick Lecture.

After Lecture, the High Sheriff prepares a Cart to carry her from the Goal, to the place of Execution: But she earnestly desiring of him the

liberty to walk on Foot; it was granted to her, and two or three of the Neighbouring Ministers did her the Favour to Walk with her, who did by turns endeavour to fill up the time with such Divine Passages of discourse as might best suit her condition; mixing with words of Consolation, something of Terroure and Caution. Her Behaviour was very grave and Christian from first to last. She retained an invincible Courage, and yet manifested nothing that had the least Tincture of a vain glorious Confidence. One of the Ministers thus glossed on her present circumstances for Terrification.

O Esther, How can your heart abide! Dont you here behold terrible displayes of Justice: you are surrounded with Armed men, which signifies that God and man has determined to rid the World of you; and you are thus beset, that you may no ways escape. The terrible place and Engines of Destruction, are but a little before us, where you must in a few Minutes Expire; and there lyes your *Coffin*, that must receive your perishing Body: How can you bear the sight of all these things? She turns about, and looking him in the face with a very smiling countenance, sayes, I know I am going to the Lord Jesus Christ. The manner, the Christian Bravery, the Chearfulness, and suddenness, with the profound matter of her Reply was surprizing and astonishing; Yet not to clip or over load the Wings of her Soaring Faith; they told her, that God did put much honour upon, and signalize his Grace to her, in that she had been the Subject of Prayers generally through the Neighbourhood. And now in that Christian and Civil Attendance that was given her in her last Journey; and from the interest she had obtained in the hearts of that Sacred Order of men, intrusted with the Keys of the Kingdom. So that they might in a humble confidence and hope, pronounce an Absolution, though not from the Temporal Punishment, yet from the Condemning Guilt of all her great Abomination; (upon a presumption of her gracious state) founded on those words *Mat. 16.19: Whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth, shall be loosed in Heaven.* The Discourse seem'd very delightful to her, making suitable, though short Replies to all.

Having walked above a mile, she seem'd a little to flag and falter in her pace; which together with a sudden paleness of countenance occasioned, one of the Ministers observing it, to ask her, How she did now? whether she felt any alteration? To which she replyed, thus; some sudden qualm of faintness and fear came upon me, but it is over, and I am very well; so presses forward again with her usual vigour. Being come in sight of the Gallows, was askt, whether her heart did not now fail her: She answers, No, but the nearer I approach, the more I feel my strength and joy to increase. When come to the Foot of the Ladder she seem'd no ways altered by any distress invading from the terrible Spectacles then in view. Mr. Sheriff

having settled his Guard, and Read the Death Warrant, asked, what she did desire further before Execution? She turning to the Ministers, desires one of them to pray with her. Prayer being ended, Mr. Sheriff bids her go up the Ladder, she readily obeys; But first with very affecting Gestures, takes her leave of the Ministers, giving them many thanks for all their kindness to her; and this she does with a mixture of Tears, and a show of moderated sorrow, and so without stop or trembling went up the Ladder; and turning her self about, made the following Discourse to the People, and Prayer to God.

The last Dying Words and Prayer of Esther Rodgers, upon the Ladder, just before her Execution, taken in Short-hand by some there present, July 31, 1701.

Here I am come to Dy a Shameful Death, and I justly deserve it: Young People take Warning, O let all take Warning by me; I beg of all to have a Care. Be Obedient to your Parents and Masters; Run not out a Nights, especially on Sabbath Nights, Refrain bad Company for the Lords Sake. Here me poor Souls, Keep Gods Sabbaths, mind the Word of God, and let good People be your Company, Mind it for the Lords Sake: Do it if you love your Lives: for Gods Sake mind your own Souls. O Run not abroad with wicked Company, or on Sabbath day Nights, and so forget what you have heard. Improve time, you do not know what Comfort is to be had and found in Gods Ways; If you do not love God, he will not love you; If you go on in Sin, you will provoke God. O let me beg of you all to hear me! for the Lords Sake Remember me! O let every one Remember me! Let me beg of all Young Ones, be not Disobedient, go not with bad Company, O my dear Friends—Take Warning by me. Here I come to Dy, and if God be not Merciful to my Soul, I shall be undone to all Eternity—If I do not turn by Repentance. I Bless God, I have found more Comfort in Prison, than ever before. O Turn to God now. O how hard it is to Repent; If you go on in Sin, God may give you up to a hard Heart. Oh! Turn whilst the Day of Grace lasts.

Her Prayer.

O LORD JESUS, I humbly beg of thee, Look upon me in Mercy, God for Christ Jesus Sake have mercy upon me. It is nothing that I can do for a Pardon—All my Prayers and Tears cannot Save me—But it is through the free Grace, and Mercy of God in the Blood of Jesus Christ. O Lord, Sprinkle that Blood upon my Soul, that will wash away all my bloody Sins. I beg pardon through him of all

those sins I am guilty of. O Lord Jesus have Compassion upon me, and say to me, as thou did to the Penitent Thief: This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Oh Lord, I come, Receive my Soul. Thou hast said, Come unto me all you that are weary and heavy laden. And they that are a thirst, thou wilt give the Water of Life to. Lord, I thirst, have mercy upon me, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, O Receive my Soul, Dear Lord Jesus, I beg of thee: Have Compassion upon me, have mercy upon me, O Lord, for Christ's sake. O pity me, and have Compassion upon me. Lord Jesus be with me, and carry me through—Thou hast said, Whosoever comes unto thee, thou wilt in no wise cast them out. O Lord I come to thee, O Lord cast me not out. Though I have deserved Death and Damnation—my sins have deserved Hell—a thousand Hells, yet Lord pity me, and pardon all my Sins, and give me an interest in Jesus Christ. Lord Jesus, thou hast said, Whosoever believeth on thee, shall never dye. O Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief. O Blessed Jesus, Receive my Soul, Blessed Lord Jesus, I come to thee, fit and and prepare me for thy self. If my heart be not humbled, humble me to the Dust. O Lord Jesus, I have been guilty of Blood enough to Damn me to all Eternity. O Lord have mercy on me, hear me, pity and pardon me. Lord I bless thee, that thou givest me any hope, thou deliverest from the Grave, and out of Hell: I might have been before this time in the Grave with the Dead, and in Hell with the Damned. Lord Jesus, thou canst give me a heart to Repent, I do Repent that ever I have sinned against so good and so gracious a God. O Lord, pity me, and send thy Holy Angels to guard my Soul into the Heavenly Kingdom, as thou didst for Lazarus. O pity me, for Jesus Christ's Sake: To whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all Honour and Glory for ever Amen.

Then Mr. Parson said to her, *The Lord is the Hearer of Prayers, and will hear thee—*

Mr. Belcher said, *He that has helped thee to make this Prayer will also hear thee—*

She then said, *O Lord Jesus Look down upon me, and Save my Soul, I trust thou wilt Receive my Soul. O Lord I commit my Soul into Thy Hands. O Father of Mercies have Mercy on me. O now Lord Jesus is the Time:—I am upon the Brink of Eternity, O Lord have Mercy upon me. O Thou Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, into thy Hands I commit my Spirit. O Receive thou it. Have Mercy upon me, and Pity me for Jesus Christ's Sake.*

Then the Officer binds an Handkerchief upon her Face—which she cheerfully receives, with Eyes and Hands lift up to Heaven.

Mr. Wise said, Now is the great Crisis of Time. Does your Faith hold in God and Christ still—

She answers, *God be thanked it does. God be thanked.—*

Then being bid to lean her Head back upon the Ladder, to receive the

Halter, She readily does it; and Cryes, *O Lord Jesus, Now Lord Jesus, I am a Coming; O Come Lord Jesus by Thy Pardonning Mercy, to Save me Now, or I Perish for ever. My Blessed Jesus,—O Lord Jesus, have Pity upon me, O Good Lord.*—And thus she remains lifting up her Hands to Heaven, till Mr. Wise said again; We have Recommended you to God, and done all we can for you, and must now leave you.—

If your Hopes can lay hold upon the irresistible Grace and Mercy of God in Christ, and you can cast your self into His Armes, you are Happy for Ever.—And so we must bid you *Fare-Well*.

THE manner of her Entertaining DEATH, was even astonishing to a Multitude of Spectators, (being as was judged Four or Five Thousand People at least) with that Composure of Spirit, Cheerfulness of Countenance, pleasantness of Speech, and a sort of Complaisantness in Carriage towards the Ministers who were assistant to her, with their Prayers and Counsils, that even melted the hearts of all that were within seeing or hearing, into Tears of affection, with greatest wonder and admiration. Her undaunted Courage and unshaken Confidence she modestly enough expressed, yet stedfastly held unto the end. So that he must needs want Faith for himself, that wants Charity for such an one.

Finis.

Source Notes

"The Declaration and Confession of Esther Rodgers" was published as part of *Death The certain Wages of Sin to the Impenitent* (Boston, 1701), a collection of the three execution sermons delivered by John Rogers, Jr. (1666–1745). The oldest son of the former Harvard president, Rogers was born and raised in Ipswich and, after finishing his education at Harvard (1684), he returned there and assisted his uncle, William Hubbard, who was minister to the First Congregational Church. Rogers was ordained in 1692, and when Hubbard's health began to fail in 1702, he assumed responsibility for the Ipswich ministry. By the time he encountered Esther Rodgers, he already had established a reputation for evangelicalism. In his *Diary*, Sewall frequently mentioned both his friendship with Rogers, with whom he often stayed with when visiting Ipswich, and the minister's emphasis on evangelical preparation. For such references, see II, 14, 31. Rogers remained in Ipswich his entire life. Not a prolific writer, *Death The certain Wages of Sin* was only one of four publications: an election sermon (1706), a funeral sermon (1739), and a short "Attestation in favor of the revival measures of Whitfield and Tennent"

(Sibley, 3, 276). By far the most ambitious of his publications, *Death The certain Wages of Sin* was endorsed by four other ministers. In addition to his uncle and colleague, William Hubbard, who wrote the first preface, Nicholas Noyes and Joseph Gerrish contributed a second preface, while Samuel Belcher added an introduction to "The Declaration and Confession of Esther Rodgers." For a brief biographical sketch of Rogers, see *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, III, 273–76.

Sewall also was one of the judges when Esther Rodgers was tried and convicted. Concerning the trial, Sewall commented in his *Diary*: "To Ipswich; Try Esther Rodgers. Jury next morn ask'd advice, then after, brought her in Guilty of murdering her Bastard daughter. July, 17. Mr. Cooke pronounc'd the sentence. She hardly said a word. I told her God had put two children for her to nurse: Her mother did not serve her so. Esther [in the Bible] was a great saviour; she, a great destroyer. Said did not do this to insult over her, but to make her sensible" (II, 39). For a discussion of the Rodgers texts, see Williams, "Behold a Tragic Scene."