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LIFE AND CONFESSION

OF

MARY RUNKLE



WHO WAS CONDEMNED AND SENTENCED TO BE EXECUTED AT
Whitesboro, Oneida Co., N. Y., on the 9th day of No-
vember, 1847, for the Murder of her Husband

JOHN RUNKLE.

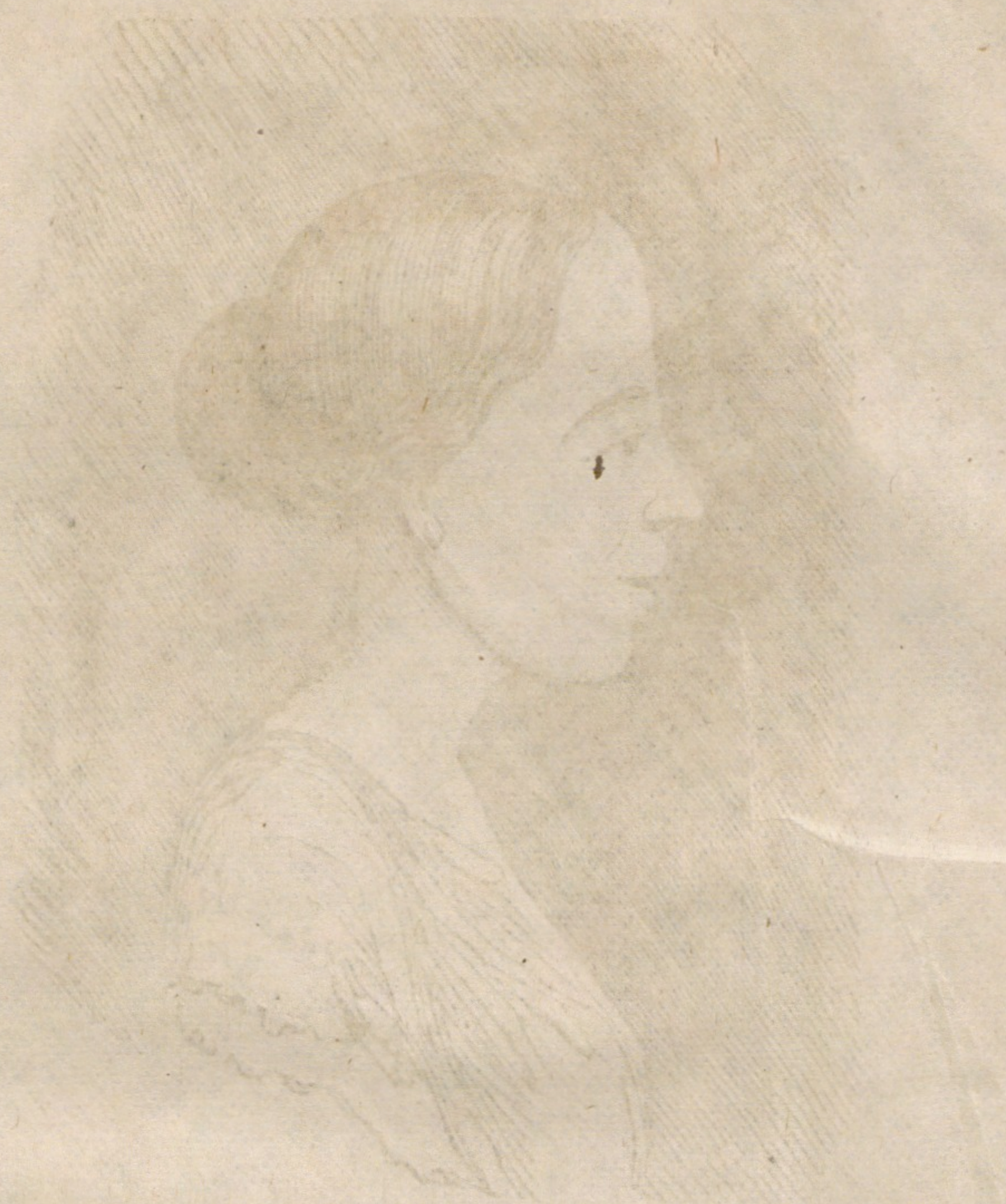
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1847.

LIFE AND CONFESSION

MARY BUCKLE



WHO WAS CONDEMNED AND EXECUTED FOR THE MURDER OF HER HUSBAND
WHITBORN, CHURCH, N. Y. on the 31st day of No-
vember, 1847, for the Murder of her Husband

JOHN BUCKLE

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STAM PRESS OF A. C. HERRING AND SONS, NEW YORK

1847

CONFESSION OF MARY RUNKLE.

WHITESBORO' JAIL, Oneida Co., N. Y., }
October, 1847. }

I was born in the town of Root, County of Montgomery, State of New York, of respectable and pious parents. Of the time of my birth, as well as that of my age, I am unable to state, as I have no record by which I can correctly give them. While single, I resided with my parents, during which time I lived happy, as I spent my time very agreeably while mingling in the society of the family circle, where parents and brothers resided beneath the same glad roof; but fate determined that my pleasures were soon to be mingled with sorrow and misery. At a proper age I was engaged to be married to a man by the name of John Runkle, who resided in the same town of that of my parents. A short time before my union was to be consummated, a report of his misconduct reached my ears, in consequence of which I resolved in my own mind that I would rather the marriage contract should cease to exist than be united with a man who was guilty of such conduct, of which resolution I made him acquainted, when he promised that in future he would make amends for his conduct, taking a solemn oath upon the Bible that he would never again be guilty of the like. His promises somewhat tended to allay my feelings, and the union took place, agreeable to our arrangement. In about two weeks after our marriage, new difficulties arose between us, which continued in some form or other to mar our happiness during a large portion of the time that we continued to live together.

About one year after our marriage I became jealous of him, and wished to leave him, against which my parents strenuously remonstrated, and through their instrumentality I continued to live with him, dragging out a most wretched existence. I often told them of his misconduct, for which they frequently reproved him, with a hope that he would in future lead a different life.

We resided in our native town about ten years, when I committed the first act of my life in violation of the law, which was instigated by my husband. He premeditated the plan, and for several weeks urged me to carry it out before I consented. It was to procure goods unlawfully from the store of Jay Cady, of Bowman's Creek, (now Ames's). To carry forward this scheme successfully he forged an order purporting to have been drawn by Benjamin

Warner, a wealthy farmer of the town, which order I presented to the counter of the said Cady, and succeeded in obtaining goods thereon—to what amount I do not now recollect. By some means I was suspected of the crime, and apprehended by the authorities of the county, and was soon to be tried, but the proceedings were staid and suit discontinued, by a settlement of the whole difficulty, where it only ended by opening a new field for further trouble.—While at Johnstown, the county seat, expecting to be tried for the aforesaid crime, my husband committed an act of petit larceny, by taking two shawls from a bureau in the public house where we stopped, against which I remonstrated, advising him not to do so. Notwithstanding he secreted and carried them off with him, we were soon followed, and the act charged upon me. He being guilty, made him anxious to settle the matter, in which he succeeded, thereby stopping further legal proceedings, and here this matter dropped.

My cup of affliction not yet being full, another species of crime more heinous than those already given was charged upon me.—Providence, whose ways and works are inscrutable, saw fit in his dispensation to remove from me two of my children, in a most mysterious manner. The circumstances of their death were so strongly enveloped in mystery that public sentiment unjustly fixed the crime of murder upon me, alleging that I had caused their death. The facts, as near as I can give them, are substantially as follows. I was in the habit of keeping them in the house out of the presence of their father, who frequently ill-treated them without cause. As he was in the field at work in the fall of the year, on a very pleasant day, I permitted them, three in number, to leave the room, the two younger in charge of their older brother, intending that they should return before the arrival of their father. After they had been absent for a short time I started with a view of calling them in. On coming out of the door I found the elder child alone at play, of whom I inquired where the other children were. He informed me that he knew not. I then called and made search for them in different places without success, the other child continuing the search, presuming that they were some where in the vicinity. I took a pail with a view of entering an out-house. On approaching the door I found it fastened; on opening it, to my great surprise and horror I there beheld my two lifeless children, drowned in a tub of briny water. With feelings that I am unable to describe, I screamed, immediately fainted, and fell to the earth. While lying in that position, my husband was sent for. On arriving, he gave me a kick or a push with his foot, at the same time inquiring “what I was doing there?” He then helped me up and assisted me into the house, where I beheld one of the children lying on the floor, and again fainted. On coming to, I found a number of persons present. The necessary steps were taken for calling a coroner’s jury; one was empaneled, and an inquest held

—rendering a verdict of accidental drowning—after which they were interred. After a lapse of several days, at the instance of a gentleman by the name of Scott, they were disinterred, another jury empaneled, and a second inquest held, before whom Dr. J. Young made a post-mortem examination, under a belief that they had been poisoned, the result of which terminated as before.

After leaving the town of Root we removed to the town of St. Johnsville, in said county, where we resided about four months; we then removed to the town of Oppenheim, now county of Fulton. While residing there my husband purchased a tavern stand in the town of Manheim, county of Herkimer, with a view of keeping a public house. In the vicinity of our residence there was located a church, which my husband urged me to rob of its cushions, for the purpose of using them as bolsters for beds, to furnish the house, to which I objected, telling him that we had already sufficient to furnish it; besides, I was opposed to the commission of the crime. But his long and continued importunities at length overcome my objections and I consented. In open day I repaired to the church, making this bold and daring adventure, as though there was no fear of being detected. I succeeded in getting four cushions and a peice of baize. As soon as they were missed, suspicion, ever on the alert, was not long in deciding upon my being guilty. I was arrested, but succeeded in effecting a settlement, thereby escaping the penalty of the law.

We next removed to the town of Floyd, county of Oneida, in March, 1833. While residing there, in the neighborhood a dwelling house and barn was fired by some incendiary. In this as in other cases, it did not require much effort to fix upon me as being guilty of the crime. Accordingly I was arrested on suspicion. After a thorough examination I was acquitted. As my husband was absent at the time of this occurrence, suspicion was also fixed upon him; on his return he was arrested likewise, tried and also acquitted. After residing four years in Floyd we removed to the town of Westmoreland, in said county. While residing there I was charged with setting on fire a pile of forty cords of wood, belonging to a man by the name Tompkins; of this crime I was not guilty. My husband had some difficulty with this same Tompkins, which terminated in several law suits between them. He recovered a judgment of \$1000 against Tompkins and one Pickard, for an assault and battery on the person of myself and husband. Through the instrumentality of this same Tompkins, bills of indictment were found against us for perjury, growing out of some of these suits, on which we were tried and acquitted. At the village of Rome, at the very time that we were admitted to bail in the indictment case, I was guilty of unlawfully taking two towels, for which I was tried and fined.

While residing here, for the first time in my life, I learned that we had been suspected of being guilty of the crime of murdering

a pedler, at the time that we resided in the town of Root, we were not in the habit of keeping pedlers; the grounds for any kind of suspicion were entirely and wholly without foundation. The report when I first heard it, produced the most unpleasent sensations in my bosom, as I knew my innocence and the unjustness of so base a charge.

I have also been charged with being guilty of poisoning my son, who was taken sick with the measles, and died. The thought of committing so base a crime was the most distant from my mind.

In the spring of the present year, 1847, we removed to the city of Utica, where we were indicted in the recorder's court for taking a washing of clothes from the bleach yard of our neighbor. Of this act I was not guilty; my husband took them, requesting me to iron them, then he would take them off and secrete them, to prevent detection. But the ever vigilant hand of justice was too ready to permit our escape. This last circumstance closes the catalogue of crime of which I have been guilty, until the ushering in of the awful tragedy that has laid the foundation for terminating the career of my earthly existence, the narrative of which is as follows.

The general health of my husband was not good; on or about the 20th of last August, he procured four phials of medicine and one-fourth gallon of brandy; a portion of the medicine he applied externally. At tea time he became furiously mad, venting his feelings upon me. I tried to quiet him, but all to no purpose; after tea, in his continued rage, he caught hold of my hair and pulled me over on the floor, continuing to kick and strike me, until I thought he would kill me. At length I got free from him, suggesting that I would call for assistance, he declaring that if I did so, he would break my neck. At a proper hour, he prepared to retire for the night, calling for some milk, which was promptly furnished. Within a very short time he took twice of the medicine, complaining that the milk was sour; he then took a large drink of the brandy, and laid down, soon calling for the wash, which he applied to his neck. Notwithstanding all my efforts to promptly administer to his wants, he was yet dissatisfied, and found much fault. From the ill-treatment that I had received from him, I found myself in much distress from the bruises he had inflicted upon me. While engaged in bathing my bruises, he frequently called upon me to come to bed; when I came into the room he ordered me to furnish him with some drink; it was done, after which I undressed and laid down with my daughter. Near eleven or twelve o'clock he called me up, requesting me to get him some more drink; I accordingly done so. At his request I laid down with him; after some solicitation from him I blew out the candle; after one o'clock in the morning I fell asleep. The first thing that I was sensible of, I found him upon my stomach, clinching me in my throat. I struggled, and a desperate fight ensued between us.

I made every effort to defend myself; while the struggle continued I struck him with such force, that he fell over a chair. I am unable to call distinctly to recollection whether I clinched him in the throat or not. He beat me with so much violence that I bled profusely at the nose, covering us, as well as the floor, with blood. After the fight was over, I helped him up, and he sat down, calling for a dry shirt, as the one he had on was quite wet, which happened in consequence of upsetting a vessel of water; besides it was covered with the blood that flowed from my nose. There was a shirt hanging near him, which he procured himself, and partly put on. I then helped him put on the one sleeve, after which he expressed a wish to lie down, as he was tired; he accordingly done so. I then laid down with him; soon after which I heard him make a strange noise. I immediately rose and procured a light, when discovering froth on his lips, I directed my daughter to call in the neighbors, it being then about daylight. I did not for one moment suppose that I would be suspected of the crime of murder, as I had no intention of terminating his existence. It was the most distant thought that ever entered my bosom. The representations that I made at the time, though not in strict consonance with my present statement, was prompted by no other motive than that of suppressing his conduct from the public gaze.

Since my confinement in prison a circumstance occurred in relation to a piece of money belonging to a fellow convict, that I cannot in justice to myself, allow to pass unnoticed, as I have been suspected of taking it, while we were room-mates, as it was missing, and which on close examination was found secreted in an obscure place; how it came there is entirely beyond my knowledge, unless put there by herself.

From the narrative that I have given, I have endeavored according to the best of my ability and recollection, to state all the important facts and circumstances connected with my life, of a criminal character; omissions, if any I have made, arise through forgetfulness, as I have no disposition of suppressing any; enough has already been given to show that my history is one that none will envy, but all would desire to shun. My cup of affliction being full, drugged with the bitterest draught of gall, has led me to reflect that I soon must die, producing the most solemn sensations as they were ushered in amid the darkness of night, while midnight slumbers were hovering around, and I confined within the walls of a felon's prison, where I endeavored to breathe out my grief to the unheeded winds, and shed in silent the bitter tears that have been coursing each other from my streaming eyes. Tears are sweet when they bring relief to an aching heart, when they drown in their crystal waters the sorrows that spring up in the bosom of those from whom they flow; but mine is not a grief to be drowned by tears; all the troubled emotions of my soul, all the hidden miseries that I have ever nurtured by the commission of Crime, have

rushed in upon me like the cold chilling waters of some mighty stream.

Those who commit a sin shall quickly find
The pressing guilt lie heavy on their mind.

The beauties which nature spreads around the virtuous and the free are denied me; my earthly temporary home is the cold and friendless walls of a prison; my only resting place, the felon's couch; condemned to die, and breathe out my last breathe upon the gallows. I look forward a few days in advance—there I behold cold death about to close the scene which I humbly trust, in Heaven will

“Answer life's great end.”

To prepare to part with life willingly, to study more how to die than to live, under the circumstances in which I am placed, is a task of no ordinary undertaking. In my meditations, I have wandered through all the meanderings of a misspent life. In contrasting it with the moral and mental rectitude in which I was created, I have been left to expatiate in sorrow, over the ruins of my own fallen character; whose beauty, by my conduct, have I deeply marred. Human life, although abounding as it does in blessings and mercies, to me is not the blissful vision which my youthful fancy imagined would follow me through life.

The bitter agonies that I have undergone, in becoming fully acquainted with myself, have proved to me a blessing; my mind has become perfectly composed; a secret spring of joy fills my heart. That which was at first so terrible and shocking, is now becoming the sweetest of my enjoyments. Realizing that I am in the hands of a just God, whose tender mercies are over all his works, fully believing that he is willing to accept of the truly penitent, I have a firm hope that my departed spirit will live in immortal day. I hope to meet friends where our joys will be full and complete, free and unalloyed from any of the jarring elements to which human life is heir to.

To the clergy who have visited me during my confinement, am I deeply indebted; and to those friends who have so kindly administered to my necessities, would I return my kind thanks. And finally, I would say to the world, that under a deep sense of my situation and of the great responsibility that I owe to my Creator, am I fully resigned to my fate, through repentance in Christ, with a clear conscience and a bright hope of a blessed immortality beyond the grave. I bid the world an affectionate adieu.