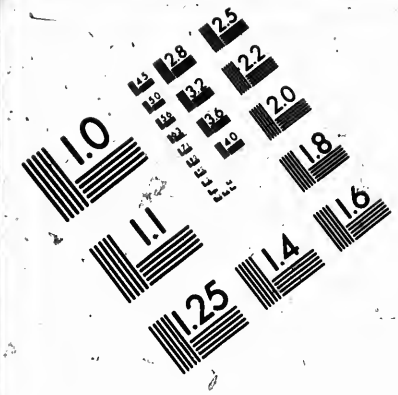

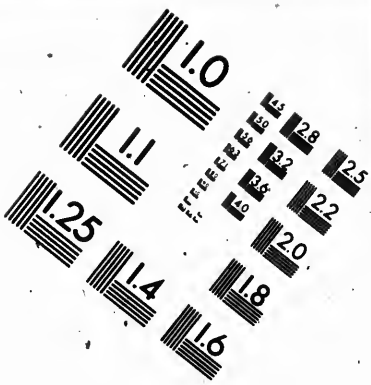

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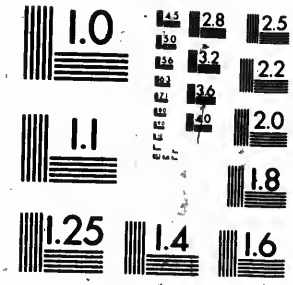

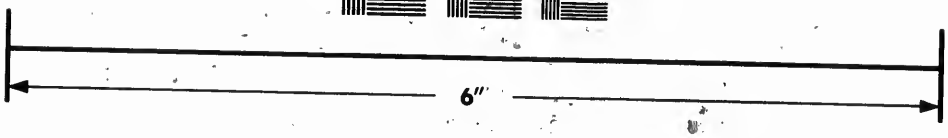

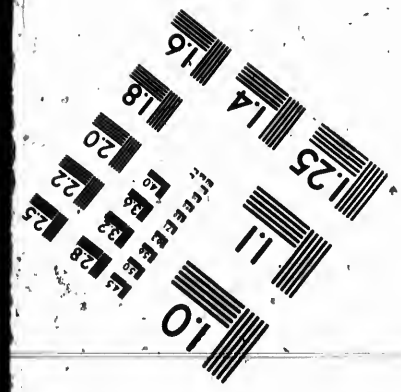

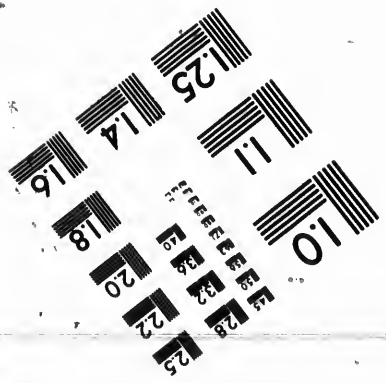

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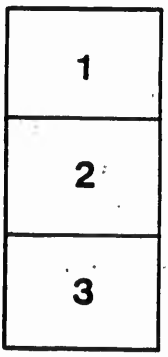

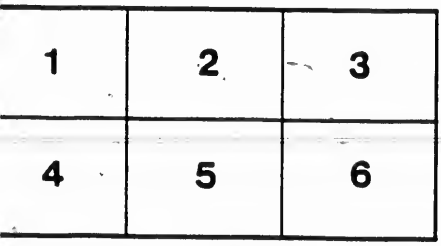

THE

PROFLIGATE SOLDIER,

AWFULLY YET MERCIFULLY RECLAIMED.

AN AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT

OF

PRIVATE JOHN JENNY,

OF HIS MAJESTY'S 73D REGIMENT OF FOOT,

WHO WAS SHOT FOR MUTINOUS CONDUCT, PURSUANT TO THE SENTENCE OF A GENERAL COURT MARTIAL,

At Colombo, in the Island of Ceylon, October 27, 1817.

BY W. M. HARVARD,

WHO ATTENDED HIM IN HIS IMPRISONMENT, AND ALSO AT HIS EXECUTION.

MONTREAL:

SOLD BY R. C. M'LEOD, 63, NOTRE DAME STREET, AND C. BRYSON, ST. FRANÇOIS XAVIER STREET.

Price Twopence each, or 20 for Half a Dollar.

TO THE READER.

The ensuing account was given at the conclusion of a sermon preached in the Garrison of Colombo, shortly after the death of the young man to whom it relates. The discourse was founded on the following words, in Ezekiel xxxiii. 5, "*But he that taketh warning shall deliver his soul*;" in the application of which, and in humble dependance on the Divine blessing, the preacher endeavoured to interest both the fears and the hopes of his military auditors in the momentous concerns of their own everlasting salvation. He then proceeded to read the accompanying narrative.

THE PROFLIGATE SOLDIER,

AWFULLY YET MERCIFULLY RECLAIMED.

THE truth of this encouraging portion of Scripture was abundantly exemplified in the case of the once unhappy man, of whom it now remains for me to give you a short account.

JOHN JENNY was born at Nottingham, on the 9th of January, 1793. His father dying at an early period of his life, he became solely dependant on his mother; and from a letter of hers, which he showed to me in his confinement, it is evident that she had taken some considerable pains to lead him to a due attention to religion and propriety of conduct. She there charges him to remember the many instructions he had received, and the early vows he had made "before the sacred altar of God."

When in his native land, however, notwithstanding his mother's admonitions, he was led astray by loose company and intoxication; which so unsettled his mind from the business to which she had apprenticed him, that he resolved to enter upon a Soldier's life; and, though only sixteen years of age, enlisted into the 2d Battalion of H. M. 73d Regiment, and was transferred into the 1st Battalion, in 1811.

The same causes which operated to bring him into the army, continued to influence him afterwards, and procured him the merited character of an unsteady, dissolute, bad man. The foundation of all this was his inclination for evil company and intoxication; as he himself assured me; and added, "Oh, Sir, warn my comrades against bad company and drunkenness. It was that which began my ruin." His evil propensities often involved him in trouble; at which times of distress he was not without serious thoughts of his awful condition, and resolutions to amend his life. But these salutary impressions wore off from forgetfulness; and the influence of temptation led him to break his resolutions as often as he had made them.

At last, it pleased God, who had, as it were, tried every other means with him, to stop him short in his mad career, by leaving him to himself, and to the commission of a crime, which brought upon him the heaviest punishment which human laws can inflict. He afterwards acknowledged the justice of God in thus abandoning him to his own evil heart; and confessed that it was right that he should be dealt with according to justice, who had so long disregarded so much mercy.

The circumstances which led to his last crime were as follows. Having dishonestly come into the possession of money,

he had spent some days in incessant intemperance; and was detected in selling part of his necessaries, when his money was expended, in order to continue his vices still longer. In consequence of this, he was ordered by his Captain to be confined in the guard-house. Enraged at his detection, and stupified by the effects of intoxication, he had the temerity to draw back his hand upon his Captain, and to strike him a violent blow on the face. This was on the 26th of September.

So outrageous a defiance of discipline could not be passed over in silence. The criminal was ordered into confinement; and a general Court Martial having been summoned, examined into the affair, and transmitted their verdict to His Excellency the Governor, the late Sir Robert Brownrigg. It was generally expected that the sentence of death would be executed upon him. With this expectation, he remained a prisoner in the stocks; and, abandoned by man, he began to think it was now high "time to seek the Lord."

Actuated by the most commendable impulse, two pious Wesleyan comrades, a Serjeant and a Corporal in the same Regiment, paid him an unsolicited visit in his solitary room. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." Their conduct is worthy of high commendation; as they had never any previous acquaintance with the unfortunate man. His trouble was the foundation of their friendship, and, as the event will prove, the means, in the hands of God, of his salvation. "Go thou and do likewise." They found him rather desirous than otherwise of religious conversation; and the former sent us out a short note, requesting that the Rev. B. Clough, my Missionary fellow-labourer, and myself, would see the prisoner; which we regularly continued to do, until the moment of his execution. The manner in which he received the visits of his religious comrades, cannot be better described than in the language of one of them:

"Soon after his trial, I was informed that he began to have serious thoughts about his future state; and being desired by one of my friends, I accompanied him to see him. On enquiring of him, if he knew how the pardon of his sins was to be obtained, his answer was, that he was very ignorant. I found him, however, willing to be taught; of which the acknowledgment of his ignorance I considered to be a proof. In the best manner that I could, I therefore endeavoured to impress upon his mind a sense of his great ingratitude to God, by laying before him the wickedness of his past life; and then comparing it with the goodness of God to him, in creating and redeeming him, and in continuing to preserve him, while, at the same time, he was persevering in sinning and rebelling against His Divine authority and goodness. I further exhorted him to repent of his sins, and turn to God with all his heart, by faith in a crucified Saviour; and that without any delay; urging that, in all probability, the sentence of the Court Martial would be death, and that his time in the world would likely be very short. I was greatly encouraged in thus speaking to him, as he listened to it all with the greatest attention."

When Mr. Clough and I first visited him, we felt it a painful duty to assure him there was not the least reason to hope for a pardon from his earthly superiors; of which we were glad to observe him fully sensible; as it left him to pursue the principal

object without distracting hopes or fears. We lent him three suitable books to read; with a Bible and Hymn-book, had received from the Corporal; and were in the habit, at our evening visitations, of catechising him on divine subjects, as well as expounding to him some portion of God's word, which particularly related to experimental religion—that being most adapted to his situation. Our's was an awful task! He seemed to devour every word! And such was his desire for salvation, that, could it have been accomplished by manual labour, I am persuaded every nerve would have been gladly and strenuously brought into exercise. But still his mind appeared to be dark, and his ideas very confused, on religious subjects. He always, however, manifested great thankfulness to us, when we went to see him; and, on parting, would grasp our hands with much affectionate fervor, as though to acknowledge his grateful sense of obligation. While he continued in the guard-room, he was visited, likewise, by the Rev. Robert Newstead, from Negombo, and by the Rev. T. Osborne, of Trincomalee: who were both considerably satisfied with the hopeful state of his mind.

At the expected time, his sentence was read to him by the Judge Advocate. He was to suffer the dreadful sentence of the law on the 27th of October; and was accordingly removed to a condemned cell. The time of his residence in the cell was about a fortnight. On his being sent there, the Fort Adjutant, Baron Mylius, at the desire of the prisoner, politely wrote us an official request to attend him during his last days; which we assured him we should do with the utmost pleasure. And it was in this outwardly melancholy little room that the Holy Spirit of God appeared to work more powerfully upon his soul. His views of himself and of religion rapidly improved, and his feelings likewise: for he seemed to be a man who had but one business to attend to—the salvation of his soul! The pleasing change in his condition is thus described by the same religious comrade:—

"I continued my visits to him, as often as duty would permit; while he remained in the guard-house; and was much pleased to see him always listen with attention to any person who came to converse with him about the concerns of his soul. It is true, that he was not so serious, when alone, as he ought to have been; but this may be accounted for, when we consider the temptations of Satan, and sometimes the tendency of worldly conversation, with the natural forgetfulness and depravity of the heart of man. These were all hindrances which kept him from turning to the Lord with all his heart. But, when the time came that he was removed from the guard-house to the condemned cell, he set about the concerns of his immortal soul with more earnestness than ever. I believe he then began to seek the Lord with all his heart. I still had opportunity to attend him in the cell, and never failed to press upon him to use all diligence in preparing to meet his God. One evening, when I went to see him, on enquiring into the state of his mind, and how he had spent the day, "Oh," said he, "this is the happiest day that ever I had. Mr. ... has been here a considerable time, and has written a letter for me;" which he then brought me to read. Afterwards he also brought me a small tract, I think it was "Serious Thoughts on Eternity," from which he said he had received much profit.* From this time there was a visible change in his countenance, and, I have no doubt, a real change in his heart also."

* This tract was published by the Religious Tract Society in London, and wa

The letter referred to was one to his mother, which Jenny had expressed a desire to write. And the Commandant of the Garrison, Colonel Young, of the Royal Artillery, having humanely sent him paper and pens and ink, for that purpose, I made it my business to be present with him, while he performed this last act of filial duty. When all things were ready, and I had mended his pen for him, the poor man remained silent and thoughtful for some time; at last, bursting out into a flood of tears, he told me that he felt unable to write, at the same time requesting I would do it for him. I freely confess, this was the most pathetic and moving circumstance, of the kind, I ever had to encounter, and I am persuaded I shall never forget my feelings on that occasion while I live.

When we had both sufficiently recovered our firmness, I conversed with him most particularly, in order to become intimately acquainted with the sentiments he wished to communicate; and, taking up the pen, wrote what I conceived a faithful expression of his feelings; suggesting to him, sentence by sentence, as it was written, to which he assented. And, after reading the whole over, with many tears, and, falling back on his bed, and crying very bitterly, he summoned up his courage, and signed it with his own hand.

It appears that this letter gave utterance to the newly-formed emotions of his heart, and was instrumental in improving his views of the way of salvation; for he always named the period of writing it, as the memorable time when his gloomy fears of futurity were removed, and he was first enabled to look upwards to God, with humble, penitent, believing, confidence in his mercy, through Jesus Christ. Under the Divine blessing, there is every reason to believe, that it was made a means of grace to his repentant soul. To the Lord be all the praise!

As it was thus so essentially his own language, an extract of the letter shall be given; only omitting those parts which were purely of a domestic and private nature.

COLOMBO, October 22, 1817.

"My dear and affectionate Mother,

"Mr. ———, one of the Missionaries in this place, has promised me he will give you every particular of my present situation. When I think how you will feel at hearing of my awful case, my heart grieves; and I wish, with all my heart,

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made particularly useful to Jenny. One day he mentioned to me the following anecdote, which is in this tract, which had been pointed out to him by Mr. Cleaveh, and which had made a very powerful impression on his mind:—"A lady, she had burnt the evening at cards, and in gay company, returning at night, found her servant maid reading a religious book. She looked over her shoulder, and said, "Poor melancholy soul! what pleasure canst thou find in poring so long over that book?" That night, the lady could not sleep, but lay sighing and weeping. Her servant repeatedly asked what was the matter? At length she burst into a flood of tears, and said "Oh! it was one word I saw in your book that troubles me; there I saw that word—ETERNITY!——O, how happy should I be, if I were prepared for Eternity!"

that I had paid more attention to your good advice, and prayers for me. I hope that God will support your mind, and comfort you with the assurance that shall meet in a better world. I can say, with truth, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble;" for, before I was in trouble, I went astray; but, I trust, I am now brought back to God.

"When I was put into confinement, the Missionaries visited me; and by their instructions, and reading the Word of God, I have been led to see and feel myself a wretched sinner; and, indeed, this I have been, especially since I saw you. But I repent of my sins before God, with all my heart; I can say I hate them, and would sooner die than live to sin against God, as I have done. I have opened all my feelings to Mr. ———, who writes this letter. He will tell you all about me.

"I am a sinner—a great sinner; but, by the grace and mercy of God, in Jesus Christ, I have a comfortable hope of heaven; and, on this account, I do not fear to die. I am at peace with all the world. My affection is the same as ever it was to you, my dear mother, and my brother. I have begged Mr. ——— to write him some good advice, which I hope he will follow. Farewell, my dear mother. Meet me in heaven, by the merits of Christ, there to sing his praises for ever, with your affectionate son,

JOHN JENNY."

After his removal to the cell, he was visited by the Rev. T. Griffiths, and the Rev. J. Chater. He was always ready to hear Christian conversation; and when his cell door was opened, he seemed glad to find it for the admission of any one who would come to speak to him on the salvation of his soul.

The letter to his mother was written on the Wednesday before his death. As has been already observed, from that day a very considerable change was visible in him. He appeared, in the general, calm and composed ever afterwards; frequently blessing God for his mercy towards him.

The sincerity of his repentance was evidenced in his desire to make restitution, to the utmost of his power; for which purpose he made a free confession of several crimes he had committed, that the character of others, who had lain under undeserved imputation on account thereof, might be cleared. In one case especially, in which a Serjeant had been reduced, on suspicion of a robbery which he had committed, he voluntarily sent for the disgraced Serjeant, confessed his crime, and begged his forgiveness.

On the Friday, making him our usual visit, I was greatly surprised to find him engaged in writing. He immediately rose, and with a cheerful, placid countenance, presented me with a paper containing his Confession—which was afterwards read to the troops in Ceylon by military authority.

CONFESSION OF JOHN JENNY, AS IT WAS WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.*

"I am committed for a crime which will affect my life; but though it is a serious matter, I am far more concerned about my general conduct and character. I have lived in a very bad way. There are many sins which human laws do not punish; and the crime for which I am committed is but a small part of my guilty life. My life has been full of evil. I wish, therefore, to think of it all, and to know the best way of purposing myself to meet my great account. And every time, when I am in my cell, my whole life comes into my mind; and thousands of things which I have not thought of for many years past. Oh, God! be merciful to me a sinner.—But how can I expect mercy, who went on in sin, till Justice laid hold

* The original Confession, in his own hand-writing, was given to the Commandant, at his own desire.

of me, and who came to God, only because I had no where else to go to?—I have hopes!—Christ died for the worst of sinners—I think God had thoughts of mercy towards me; else why did he bring me here? Why has he given me so long time to think of my state? What brought me to my Captain's place? I cannot tell. I had no business there. It was that I might be brought hither, to be taught the way of salvation. I bless God, night and day, that I ever entered the walls of this prison. This little hope I feel, that I shall obtain mercy, it gives an happiness to which none of the pleasures of sin can ever be compared. I NEVER KNEW ANY THING OF HAPPINESS TILL NOW! O that I may but be saved at the last!—I confess the justice of my sentence; and I warn all my comrades against evil company and drunkenness, by which I brought myself to this unhappy end, which I now must suffer. I had rather die this death, than be set at my liberty, and left to myself, and my own wicked heart, to run into the temptations of the wicked world again!—God, who knows the secret thoughts of my heart, knows that this is the truth; and I hope God will give me true repentance and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ! I beg you will with me unite in prayer to God Almighty. I die in peace with God and all the world.

"Colombo, 24th day of October. 1817.

"Given under my hand, far from my home,

(Signed) JOHN JENNY.

"I confess, to God and man, that I was guilty of taking Serjeant ——— box, for which Serjeant ——— was charged; and all I got of it was two six dollars, and two fanams. Me and ——— were the men. And I likewise confess that I took seventy six dollars out of Ensign Barnes' desk, on the South Gate Guard; two twenty-five and two ten dollar bills. And I likewise knew of the affair of Kandy;* but the man that came to prosecute me knew nothing about it. And the man ——— that was with me, was not guilty: for I was on sentry myself when it was done: ——— and ——— were the men.

(Signed) JOHN JENNY."

On perusing the paper, I commended him for his openness and honesty of confession; and we had some interesting conversation together about the things of God, and of salvation.

As his end approached, his spiritual improvement daily became more and more evident. He was truly a wonder to all who came to see him. When some superior Staff Officers visited him, and supposing, from his serenity, that he was buoying himself up with the hopes of pardon, he assured them, in the most modest manner, that that was not the case; and added, "Gentlemen, this cell has been more than a palace to me—I bless God that ever I was brought in here!—I would rather take my sentence tomorrow, with the humble hopes I have, than have a pardon, and live to sin against God, as I have done in my past life."

The day before his death, the late Hon. and Venerable Doctor Twisleton, Archdeacon of Colombo, visited him, as he expressed himself, "to behold a man, who, at the close of a wicked life, has repentant feelings, and to congratulate him;" and was much struck with admiration at his case. He was not a man of many words; but what he said clearly displayed the state of his mind.

Feeling a holy jealousy for him, we were careful to examine him in the most scrutinizing manner, setting before him the law-

* A robbery that had been attempted on the Treasury in Kandy, for which Jenny was tried by a Court Martial; but was acquitted, from the notoriously bad character of a principal evidence.

ful danger of a miscarriage, in a work which, in his situation could be done but once. He always answered our enquiries, as to his real feelings of heart, with the most child-like openness; and we are satisfied that he found peace with God, and experienced the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit.

The testimony of his pious friend, already spoken of, is likewise satisfactory on this head. He observes:—

"I had still some fears on my mind, lest he should be taken up with a false peace; and one day I asked him, in a very solemn manner, on what grounds he built his hopes of heaven. He paused for a little, and then said, "I have been a great sinner; and all my hope and trust is in the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ." This was a satisfactory answer; and I think I could not desire a plainer. I was with him a considerable part of the day before his death; when we joined in prayer several times; and one time I pressed on him to pray himself. He was rather unwilling to begin, being afraid lest he could not express himself in a proper manner; but I told him that God did not look for fine words, but at the sincerity of the heart. Then he began to confess that we had done many things which we ought not to have done, and that we had left undone those things which we ought to have done; and went on to pray that the Lord would have mercy on us, and that he might strengthen and support him in his hour of trial; and so concluded. During the evening, when I was with him, I asked him if there was any part of the Word of God that he could apply to himself. "Yes," said he; "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." At another time, I enquired whether he would be willing to accept of his pardon, and live the life he had done, or whether he would rather suffer. His answer was, that he would rather suffer."

On the evening before his execution, being the Lord's Day, we administered the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to him, and a few religious friends, who felt a satisfaction in communicating with him. That cell never saw such a scene before! It was an awfully pleasing service! The poor man appeared greatly refreshed; nor, I believe, will the season ever be forgotten by those who survive. Surely Jesus is present "wheresoever two or three are met together" in his name! After the Sacrament, we sat a short time in religious conversation, each telling something of the goodness of God towards himself; and, about twelve o'clock, we left poor Jenny, with his two Christian friends, to take a little sleep, and thus be the better prepared for the solemn transactions of the approaching morning. On going again, between four and five o'clock, we were glad to find he had slept almost the whole of the time; not appearing in the least agitated or discomposed, excepting one sudden start during his short sleep, perhaps an involuntary effort of lingering humanity, against the dreadful moment which was drawing so near.

Doctor Twisleton kindly went with us to the cell, in the morning, and prayed with us. The prisoner had no fears; and when the gun fired, as a signal for the troops in the garrison to assemble, he requested the Provost Marshal to be informed that he was ready, and did not wish any delay on his account. The Commandant, Colonel Young, displayed much compassionate interest in the case of the condemned penitent, and generously acceded to any request which was made in his behalf. By his express permission, his two religious comrades supported him to

the awful spot, and performed the last offices for him after his execution!* Colonel O'Connell, likewise, considerately set them free from regimental duty, for the same purpose.

Doctor Twisleton accompanied the solemn procession along with us, and was greatly gratified with his continued peace and serenity of mind. Under the South Gate, I observed to him that I hoped he was going out of an earthly gate, in order to enter into an heavenly one. He replied, "Yes: glory be to God, I hope I am." After we had proceeded a few paces farther, he lifted his eyes to heaven, and exclaimed, "I shall soon see him, whom I love." When he had got outside of the Fort, in view of the parade on which he was to suffer death, he commenced, quite unexpectedly to us, repeating the 43d hymn: "And am I born to die," &c., which he went completely through without any mistake, repeating the last verse with the sweetest expression and emphasis imaginable:—

> "So shall I love my God
> Because he first loved me,
> And praise thee in thy bright abode
> To all eternity."

Casting his eyes upward, with humble confidence, he added, "Yes, glory be to God, I shall."

At Doctor Twisleton's request, he repeated the whole hymn again in the same manner. It had been pointed out to him by Corporal ———, at the commencement of his confinement, and had been rendered so useful to him, that he had committed the whole to memory, most correctly.†

When the procession approached the line, down which we were slowly to move, it was observed by some in the ranks that his countenance appeared to glisten with joy and composure! He retained his firmness: while we continued, on each side, to assist his remembrance, by repeating portions of Scripture adapted to his circumstances; to which he, two or three times, returned the most pleasing and satisfactory replies. On reaching the end of the line, we marched to the centre of the army, when his coffin was placed upon the ground. We kneeled round it, and commended him to God, in solemn prayer; and he was almost immediately dismissed from the body, into an eternal world. His last words were, "Farewell! glory be to God! I am a happy man."

So died John Jenny, October 27, 1817, aged nearly 25 years. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire."—Zech. iii. 2.

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* One of these friends, with true Christian simplicity, afterwards relating to us the circumstances of his interment, observed:—"Notwithstanding his crime deprived him of the common religious ceremony of a Christian burial, I trust I did not do wrong; but while the grave was filling up, I felt myself involuntarily saying, "In sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection to eternal life;" I was so satisfied with his end, and so assured of his happiness."

† The whole of the hymn is inserted at the end of this Memoir, and may be

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The Hymn which John Jenny repeated, from memory, on his way to the Place of Execution.

Hymn 43. S. M.

1. And am I born to die?
To lay this body down?
And must my trembling spirit fly
Into a world unknown?
A land of deepest shade,
Unpierc'd by human thought!
The dreary regions of the dead,
Where all things are forgot!

2. Soon as from earth I go,
What will become of me!
Eternal happiness or woe
Must then my portion be.
Wak'd by the trumpet's sound,
I from my grave shall rise,
And see the Judge with glory crown'd,
And see the flaming skies!

3. How shall I leave my tomb?
With triumph or regret?
A fearful, or a joyful doom,
A curse or blessing meet!
Will angel-hands convey
Their brother to the bar?
Or devils drag my soul away
To meet its sentence there?

4. Who can resolve the doubt,
That tears my anxious breast?
Shall I be with the damn'd cast out,
Or number'd with the blest?
I must from God be driven,
Or with my Saviour dwell;
Must come, at his command, to heaven,
Or else—depart—to hell.

5. O thou, that would'st not have
One wretched sinner die;
Who diedst thyself my soul to save
From endless misery!
Show me the way to shun
Thy dreadful wrath severe,
That when thou comest on thy throne,
I may with joy appear!

6. Thou art thyself the way;
Thyself in me reveal;
So shall I spend my life's short day
Obedient to thy will;
So shall I love my God,
Because he first loved me,
And praise thee in thy bright abode,
To all eternity.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

CONTINENTAL INDIA AND CEYLON.

A NARRATIVE OF THE COMMENCEMENT AND PROGRESS OF THE ASIATIC WESLEYAN MISSION: *including Notices of the History, Inhabitants, Productions, and Superstitions, of Ceylon and Continental India. A new edition, with a Continuation of the Missionary History to the year* 1836.

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Subscribers' names will be obligingly received, and forwarded to the author, by any of the Wesleyan Ministers in Upper or Lower Canada, as well as by Messrs. M'Leod and [illegible]