

**THE COMPLAINT; OR, NIGHT
THOUGHTS, ON LIFE, DEATH,
AND IMMORTALITY. WITH
THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR**

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Author by Edward Young

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BY EDWARD YOUNG, L. L. D.

WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

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1812.

MEMOIRS
OF THE LATE
DR. EDWARD YOUNG.

EDWARD YOUNG, L. L. D. author of the *Night Thoughts*, and many other excellent pieces, was the only son of Dr. Edward Young, an eminent, learned, and judicious divine, dean of Sarum, fellow of Winchester college, and rector of Upham, in Hampshire. He was born in the year 1684, at Upham; and, after being educated in Winchester college, was chosen on the foundation of New College at Oxford, October 13th, 1703, when he was nineteen years of age; but being superannuated*, and there being no vacancy of a fellowship, he removed before the expiration of the year to Corpus Christi, where he entered himself a gentleman commoner.

In 1708, he was put into a law fellowship, at all Souls, by Archbishop Tennison. Here he took the degree of B. C. L. in 1714, and in 1719,

* Disqualified on account of his years.

D. C. L. In this year he published his Tragedy of Busiris: in 1721, the Revenge; and in 1723, the Brothers: about this time he published his elegant Poem on the Last Day, which being wrote by a Layman, gave the more satisfaction. He soon after published the Force of Religion, or Vanquished Love, a poem, which also gave much pleasure, to most who read it, but more especially to the noble family for whose entertainment it was principally written. Some charge the Author with a stiffness of versification in both these poems; but they met with such success as to procure him the particular friendship of several of the nobility, and among the rest the patronage of the Duke of Wharton, which greatly helped him in his finances. By his Grace's recommendation, he put up for member of parliament for Cirencester,* but did not succeed. His noble patron honoured him with his company to All Souls; and, through his instance and persuasion, was at the expence of erecting a considerable part of the new buildings then carrying on in that college. The turn of his mind leading him to divinity, he quitted the law, which he had never practised, and taking orders, was appointed chaplain in ordinary to king George II. April 1728.

In that year he published a Vindication of Providence, in 4to. and soon after his Estimate of Human Life, in the same size, which have gone through several editions in 12mo. and thought by many to be the best of his prose performances. In 1730, he was presented by his college to the rectory of Welwyn, in Hertfordshire, reputed

* He was naturally of an ambitious temper and disposition.

worth 300*l.* a year, besides the lordship of the Manor annexed to it. He was married in 1731, to lady Betty Lee, widow of Colonel Lee, and daughter to the earl of Litchfield, (a lady of an eminent genius and great poetical talents) who brought him a son and heir not long after their marriage.

Though always in high esteem with many of the first rank, he never rose to great preferment. He was a favorite of the late Prince of Wales, his present Majesty's father; and, for some years before his death, was a pretty constant attendant at Court; but, upon the Prince's decease, all his hopes of farther rising in the church were at an end; and, towards the latter part of his life, his very desire of it seemed to be laid aside; for in his *Night Thoughts* he observes, that there was one, (meaning himself) in Britain born, with courtiers bred, who thought even wealth might come a day too late; however, upon the death of Dr. Hales, in 1761, he was made Clerk of the Closet to the Princess Dowager of Wales.

About the year 1741, he had the unhappiness to lose his wife, and both her children, which she had by her first husband; a son and a daughter, very promising characters. They all died within a short time of each other: that he felt greatly for their loss, as well as for that of his lady, may easily be perceived by his fine poem of the *Night Thoughts*, occasioned by it. This was a species of poetry peculiarly his own, and has been unrivalled by all who have attempted to copy him. His applause here was deservedly great. The unhappy Bard, "whose griefs in melting numbers flow, and melancholy joys diffuse around," has

been often sung by the profane as well as pious. They were written, as before observed, under the recent pressure of his sorrow for the loss of his wife, and his daughter and son-in-law; they are addressed to Lorenzo, a man of pleasure, and the world, and who, it is generally supposed, (and very probably) was his ~~own~~ own son, then labouring under his father's displeasure. His son-in-law is said to be characterised by Philander; and his daughter was certainly the person he speaks of under the appellation of Narcissa: See Night 3. l. 62. In her last illness he accompanied her to Montpellier, in the south of France, where she died soon after her arrival in the city*.

After her death it seems she was denied Christian burial †, on account of being reckoned a heretic, by the inhabitants of the place; which inhumanity is justly resented in the same beautiful poem: See Night 3, line 165; in which his wife also is frequently mentioned; and he thus laments the loss of all three in an apostrophe to death:

“ Insatiate Archer! could not *one* suffice?”

“ Thy shaft flew *thrice*, and *thrice* my peace was slain;

“ And *thrice*, ere *thrice* yon moon had fill'd her horn.”

* She died of a consumption, occasioned by her grief for the death of her mother.

† The Priests refusing the Doctor leave to bury his daughter in one of their church-yards, he was obliged, with the assistance of his servant, to dig a grave in a field near Montpellier, where they deposited the body without the help of any of the inhabitants, who consider protestants in the same light as they do brutes

He wrote his conjectures on Original Composition, when he was turned of 80; if it has blemishes mixed with its beauties, it is not to be wondered at, when we consider his great age, and the many infirmities which generally attend such an advanced period of life. However, the many excellent remarks this work abounds with, make it justly esteemed as a brightening before death: the *Resignation*, a poem, the last and least esteemed of all Dr. Young's works, was published a short time before his death, and only served to manifest the taper of genius, which had so long shone with peculiar brightness in him, was now glimmering in the socket. He died in his parsonage-house, at Welwyn, April 12th, 1765, and was buried, according to his own desire, (attended by all the poor of the parish) under the altar-piece of that church, by the side of his wife *. This altar-piece is reckoned one of the most curious in the kingdom, adorned with an elegant piece of needle-work by the late lady Betty Young †.

Before the Doctor died, he ordered all his manuscripts to be burnt. Those that knew how much he expressed in a small compass, and that he never wrote on trivial subjects, will lament both the excess of his modesty (if I may so term it) and

* The bell did not toll at his funeral, nor was any person allowed to be in mourning.

† In the middle of it are inscribed these words, "I am the bread of life." On the north side of the chancel is this inscription, as supposed by the Doctor's orders, "VIRGINIBUS—Increase in Wisdom and Understanding;" and opposite, on the south side, "PUERISQUE—and in favour with God and Man."

See App. to Biog. Brit.

the irreparable loss to posterity; especially when it is considered, that he was the intimate acquaintance of Addison, and was himself one of the writers of the *Spectator*.

In his life-time he published two or three sermons, one of which was preached before the House of Commons. He left an only son and heir, Mr. Frederick Young, who had the first part of his education at Winchester school, and became a scholar upon the Foundation; was sent, in consequence thereof, to New College in Oxford; but there being no vacancy, (though the Society waited for no less than two years) he was admitted in the mean time in Baliol College, where he behaved so imprudently as to be forbidden the College. This misconduct disoblged his father so much, that he never would suffer him to come into his sight afterwards: however, by his will, he bequeathed to him, after a few legacies, his whole fortune, which was considerable.

As a Christian and Divine, he might be said to be an example of primeval piety: he gave a remarkable instance of this one Sunday, when preaching in his turn at St. James's; for, though he strove to gain the attention of his audience, when he found he could not prevail, his pity for their folly got the better of all decorum; he sat back in the pulpit, and burst into a flood of tears.

The turn of his mind was naturally solemn; and he usually, when at home in the country, spent many hours in a day walking among the tombs in his own churchyard. His conversation, as well as writings, had all a reference to a future life; and this turn of mind mixed itself even with his improvements in gardening: he had, for instance, an alcove, with a bench so well painted in it, that,