

# **THE SAINTS' EVERLASTING REST**

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The saints' everlasting rest by Richard Baxter

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**RICHARD BAXTER**

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SAINTS' EVERLASTING REST

BY

REV. RICHARD BAXTER.

ABRIDGED BY BENJAMIN FAWCETT, A. M.

WITH EXTRACTS FROM

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY THOMAS ERSKINE, ESQ.

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EXTRACTS

FROM

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY THOMAS ERSKINE, ESQ., ADVOCATE.

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WE do not arrogate to ourselves so much as to suppose, that our commendation can add any thing to the authority of such a name as that of RICHARD BAXTER. He belonged to a class of men, whose characters and genius, now universally venerated, seem to have been most peculiarly adapted, by Divine Providence, to the circumstances of their age and country. We do not speak only of those who partook in Baxter's views of ecclesiastical polity; but of those who, under any name, maintained the cause of truth and liberty, during the eventful period of the seventeenth century. They were made of the same firm stuff with the Wickliffs, and the Luthers, and the Knoxes, and the Cranmers, and the Latimers, of a former age. They formed a distinguished division of the same glorious army of reformation; they encountered similar obstacles, and they were directed, and supported, and animated, by the same spirit. They were the true and enlightened crusaders, who, with all the zeal and courage which conducted their chivalrous ancestors to the earthly Jerusalem, fought their way to the heavenly city; and rescuing, by their sufferings and by their labours, the key of knowledge from the unworthy hands in which it had long lain rusted and misused, generously left it as a rich inheritance to all coming generations. They speak with the solemn dignity of martyrs. They seem to feel the importance of their theme, and the perpetual presence of Him who is the great subject of it. There are only two things which they seem to consider as realities—the favour of God and the enmity of God; and only two parties in the universe to choose between—the party of God, and the party of his adversaries. Hence that heroic and noble tone which marks their lives and their writings. They had chosen

their side, and they knew that it was worthy of all they could do or suffer for it.

The agitated state of surrounding circumstances gave them continual proof of the instability of all things temporal; and inculcated on them the necessity of seeking a happiness which might be independent of external things. They thus practically learned the vanity and nothingness of life, except in its relation to eternity; and they declared to their fellow-creatures the mysteries of the kingdom of God, with the tone of men who knew that the lightest word which they spoke outweighed, in the balance of reason as well as of the sanctuary, the value of all earth's plans, and politics, and interests. They were upon high and firm ground. They stood in the midst of that tempestuous ocean, secure on the Rock of Ages; and as they uttered to those around them their invitations, or remonstrances, or consolations, they thought not of the tastes, but of the necessities of men—they thought only of the difference between being lost and being saved, and they cried aloud, and spared not.

There is no doubt a great variety of thought, and feeling, and expression, to be met with in the theological writers of that class; but deep and solemn seriousness is the common character of them all. They seem to have felt much. Religion was not allowed to remain as an unused theory in their heads; they were forced to live on it as their food, and to have recourse to it as their only strength and comfort. Hence their thoughts are never given as abstract views; they are always deeply impregnated with sentiment. Their style reminds us of the light which streams through the stained and storied windows of an ancient cathedral. It is not light merely, but light modified by the rich hues, and the quaint forms, and the various incidents, of the pictured medium through which it passes. So these venerable worthies do not give us merely ideas, but ideas coloured by the deep affections of their own hearts; they do not merely give us truth, but truth in its historical application to the various struggles, and difficulties, and dejections of their strangely-chequered lives. This gives a great interest to their writings. They are real men, and not books, that we are conversing with. And the peace, and the strength, and the hope, which they describe, are not the fictions of fancy, but the positive and substantial effects of the knowledge of God on their own minds. They are thus not merely waymarks to direct our journeyings; they seem themselves

pilgrims travelling on the same road, and encouraging us to keep pace with them. In their books, they seem thus still to journey, still to combat; but, O! let us think of the bright reality!—their contests are past, their labours are over; they have fought the good fight, and they are now at rest, made perfect in Christ Jesus. They are joined to that cloud of witnesses, of whom the world was not worthy; and their names are inscribed in the rolls of heaven; yet not for their own glory, but for the glory of him who washed them from their sins in his own blood, and whose strength was made perfect in their weakness.

These were the great men of England, and to them, under God, is England indebted for much of that which is valuable in her public institutions, and in the character of her people. They were indeed a noble army; they were born from above to be the combatants for truth, they were placed in the gap, and they held their ground, or fell at their posts.

In this army Richard Baxter was a standard-bearer. He laboured much, as well in preaching as in writing; and with an abundant blessing on both. He had all the high mental qualities of his class in perfection. His mind is inexhaustible, and vigorous, and vivacious, to an extraordinary degree. He seizes irresistibly on the attention, and carries it along with him; and we assuredly do not know any author who can be compared with him, for the power with which he brings his reader directly face to face with death, and judgment, and eternity; and compels him to look upon them, and converse with them. He is himself most deeply serious, and the holy solemnity of his own soul seems to envelope the reader, as with the air of a temple.

*The Saints' Everlasting Rest* was written on a bed of sickness. It contains those thoughts and feelings which occupied, and fortified, and animated the author, as he stood on the brink of eternity. The examples of heavenly meditation which he gives, really breathe of heaven; and the importance of such meditation, as a duty, and as a means of spiritual growth, is admirably set forth, and most powerfully enforced. And is it not a most pernicious madness and stupidity to neglect this duty? Is it not strange that such prospects should excite so little interest? Is it not strange that the uncertainty of the duration of life, and the certainty of its sorrows, do not compel men to seek refuge in that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away? Is it not strange that the offers of friendship, and intimate relationship, which God is continually holding out to us, should be slighted,



even in competition with the society of those whom we cannot but despise and reprobate? Is it not strange that we should, day after day, allow ourselves to be duped by the same false promises of happiness, which have disappointed us, just as often as they have been trusted? O! let us be persuaded, that there is no rest in created things. No: there is no rest, except in Him who made us. Who is the man that can say he has found rest elsewhere? No man says it. May God open our hearts, as well as our understandings, to see the truth; that we may practically know the insufficiency, and hollowness, and insecurity of all earthly hopes; and that we may be led, in simplicity and earnestness, to seek, and so to find, our rest in Himself.

T. E.

EMMSURON, February, 1824.

THE

## COMPILER'S PREFACE.

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MR. RICHARD BAXTER, the author of the *Saints' Rest*, so well known to the world by this and many other excellent and useful writings, was a learned, laborious, and eminently holy divine of the last age. He was born near Shrewsbury in 1615, and died at London in 1691.

His ministry, in an unsettled state, was for many years employed with great and extensive success, both in London and in several parts of the country; but he was no where fixed so long, or with such entire satisfaction to himself, and apparent advantage to others, as at Kidderminster. His abode there was indeed interrupted, partly by his bad health, but chiefly by the calamities of a civil war, yet in the whole it amounted to sixteen years; nor was it by any means the result of his own choice, or that of the inhabitants of Kidderminster, that he never settled there again, after his going from thence in 1660. Before his coming thither, the place was overrun with ignorance and profaneness; but, by the divine blessing on his wise and faithful cultivation, the fruits of righteousness sprung up in rich abundance. He at first found but a single instance or two of daily family prayer in a whole street; and, at his going away, but one family or two could be found in some streets that continued to neglect it. And on Lord's days, instead of the open profanation to which they had been so long accustomed, a person, in passing through the town, in the intervals of public worship, might overhear hundreds of families engaged in singing psalms, reading the Scriptures and other good books, or such sermons as they had wrote down, while they heard them from the pulpit. His care of the souls committed to his charge, and the success of his labours among them, were truly remarkable; for the number of his stated communicants rose to six hundred, of whom he himself declared there were not twelve concerning whose sincere piety he had not reason to entertain good hopes. Blessed be God, the religious spirit which was thus happily introduced, is yet to be traced in the town and neighbourhood in some degree—O that it were in a greater!—and in proportion as that spirit remains, the name of Mr. Baxter continues in the most honourable and affectionate remembrance.

As a writer, he has the approbation of some of his greatest contemporaries, who best knew him, and were under no temptations to be partial

in his favour. Dr. Barrow said "His practical writings were never mended, and his controversial ones seldom confuted." With a view to his casuistical writings, the Hon. Robert Boyle declared, "He was the fittest man of the age for a casuist, because he feared no man's displeasure, nor hoped for any man's preferment." Bishop Wilkins observed of him, "that he had cultivated every subject he had handled; that if he had lived in the primitive times, he would have been one of the fathers of the church; and that it was enough for one age to produce such a person as Mr. Baxter." Archbishop Usher had such high thoughts of him, that, by his earnest importunity, he put him upon writing several of his practical discourses, particularly that celebrated piece, his *Call to the Unconverted*. Dr. Manton, as he freely expressed it, "thought Mr. Baxter came nearer the apostolical writings than any man in the age." And it is both as a preacher and a writer that Dr. Bates considers him, when, in his funeral sermon for him, he says: "In his sermons, there was a rare union of arguments and motives, to convince the mind and gain the heart. All the fountains of reason and persuasion were open to his discerning eye. There was no resisting the force of his discourses, without denying reason and divine revelation. He had a marvellous facility and copiousness in speaking. There was a noble negligence in his style, for his great mind could not stoop to the affected eloquence of words: he despised flashy oratory, but his expressions were clear and powerful; so convincing the understanding, so entering into the soul, so engaging the affections, that those were as deaf as adders who were not charmed by so wise a charmer. He was animated with the Holy Spirit, and breathed celestial fire, to inspire heat and life into dead sinners, and to melt the obdurate in their frozen tombs. His books, for their number (which it seems was more than one hundred and twenty) and variety of matter in them, make a library. They contain a treasure of controversial, casuistical, and practical divinity. His books of practical divinity have been effectual for more numerous conversions of sinners to God, than any printed in our time; and, while the church remains on earth, will be of continual efficacy to recover lost souls. There is a vigorous pulse in them, that keeps the reader awake and attentive."—To these testimonies may not improperly be added that of the editors of his practical works in four folio volumes; in the preface to which they say:—"Perhaps there are no writings among us that have more of a true Christian spirit, a greater mixture of judgment and affection, or a greater tendency to revive pure and undefiled religion; that have been more esteemed abroad, or more blessed at home, for the awakening the secure, instructing the ignorant, confirming the wavering, comforting the dejected, recovering the profane, or improving such as are truly serious, than the practical works of this author." Such were the apprehensions of eminent persons, who were well acquainted with Mr. Baxter and his writings.