

## Prayer of the Month • October 2016

### His Prayer for Absolution

For those my unbaptized rhymes,  
Writ in my wild unhallowed times,  
For every sentence, clause, and word,  
That's not inlaid with Thee, my Lord,  
Forgive me, God, and blot each line  
Out of my book, that is not Thine.  
But if, 'mongst all, Thou find'st here one  
Worthy thy benediction,  
That one of all the rest shall be  
The glory of my work, and me.

Robert Herrick, 1591–1674

This is the prayer of a poet, a writer of rhyme, asking for forgiveness for past times when he had ignored or overlooked God. Implicitly, then, he is praying for the opposite of all 'that is not thine'. It is perhaps a harsh way of looking at life – looking at the shadows in a photograph, say, rather than the light. The result of this looking, is up to God, not the poet, but if God should find something worth blessing, worth keeping, then that will be thing thing to focus on and to give thanks for.

Robert Herrick was born in Cheapside, London, in 1591, the fourth son and seventh child, of Nicholas Herrick, who fell out of a window when Robert was a year old. In 1607 he became apprenticed to his uncle, a goldsmith and jeweller to the king. His apprenticeship lasted only six years, for he went on to study at Cambridge, graduating in 1617. He became a member of the 'Sons of Ben', a group of admirers of the works of Ben Jonson. He was ordained in 1623 and became Vicar of Dean Prior in Devon, but lost this position because of his royalist inclination, as he refused to make a pledge to the Solemn League and Covenant during the Civil War. He returned to London where he relied on the help of family and friends. He spent some time preparing his poems for publication, and had them printed in 1648, with the title *Hesperides; or the Works both Human and Divine* of Robert Herrick, with a dedication to the Prince of Wales. It is a collection of 1200 lyrical poems. It includes the famous lines: 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, / Old time is still a-flying; / And this same flower that smiles today, / To-morrow will be dying.' When King Charles II was restored to the throne in 1660, Herrick petitioned for restoration to his living. Charles restored him to the parish of Dean Prior in 1662, and he remained there until his death in 1674 at the age of 83. His date of death is not known, but he was buried on 15 October.

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