

A Sweet Meditation:

A poem on the benefit of reading, conference, musing on holy things, and prayer:
containing a complaint that these holy exercises are neglected for that which is
worse than nothing, even men's sinful will

Richard Rogers

1603

From his:

Seven Treatises

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Introduction

Richard Rogers (1551-1618), in his continual walking with God was ‘the Enoch of his age,’ according to his esteemed puritan grandson, William Jenkyn.¹ Rogers, the pious Cambridge scholar and early organizing Presbyterian, wrote the first, exceedingly influential English puritan handbook on the spiritual and practical life devoted to God, entitled *Seven Treatises*. In it he encourages Christians to exercise watchfulness, practice meditation, use one’s spiritual armor (Eph. 6), engage in prayer, read scripture and other godly authors, offer thanksgiving and practice fasting. The godly saints that followed in his direction became known as ‘precisionists’, according to the famed anecdote when someone remarked to Rogers: ‘I like you and your company very well, only you are too precise.’ Rogers replied, ‘Oh, sir, I serve a very precise God.’ Rogers’ legacy followed him. Two of his sons became puritan ministers: Daniel and Ezekiel. Three more of his step-sons from his second wife also became puritan ministers: Samuel, John and Nathaniel.¹ Rogers today is best known for his *magnum opus* *Commentary on the Book of Judges Buy* which has been published in facsimile form by the Banner of Truth. For a further short biography of Rogers and a spiritually savory review of his commentary on Judges, see Beeke and Pederson’s, *Meet the Puritans*.¹

¹ Joel Beeke and Joel Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006) pp. 505-8

A Sweet Meditation

Oh, what a blessed thing it is
with godly learned to talk,
By reading and by conference,
both as we sit and walk!

And oft to think upon the joy
by God for his prepared,
And eke² to pray with groans to Him!
the like has not been heard.

It does revive our hearts most dull,
and bring our minds in frame:
It does endue our souls with light,
made fit to praise God's name.

It causes us our time to spend
in fruit, and heavenly sort:
It keeps from every evil way,
and so from ill report.

² [Definition: To put forth with great effort.]

It holds our minds from earthly thoughts

and vanities most vain:

It does become pleasant and sweet,

instead of irksome pain.

By this, ill tidings are not feared,

afflictions are not hard:

But from impatience and ire,

hereby we are preserved.

By meditation and reading,

with prayer annexed thereto,

We make our gain of that which we

are loth once to forego.

It makes us a savor sweet

in places where we come;

That some are gained to God thereby,

and folly has no room.

Blessed is he whose portion this,

instead of toil is given

Whereby some cannot read a line

from morning unto even.

And as his lot in fairer ground
is cast whom this benighteth,
In reading and in study sweet
that joyfully delighteth:

So he that sees not this grace
and privilege most great,
Sorrow and shame shall him pursue,
and folly be his meat.

I speak of those whose calling is
by learning for to live:
Whom God would have be free from world,
and good example give.

And so of every one, as he
has liberty and leave,
That he do not for fond delights
himself hereof bereave.

But Lord, what grief it is to think
that this so happy a lot
Should be trod down, as pearls of swine,
of many a drunken sot!

That this deceitful merchandise
of profit and of gain,
Should darken so and blind men's eyes,
that they should loathe this pain:

That some should dream of honor high,
and of promotion, so
That this sweet state with all her fruits,
they should gladly forego:

That neither Scripture given by God,
nor books by learned made,
Can cause them be in love with them,
and so forsake their trade.

Indeed it does require the heart
from evil to be brought,
That lovers of pleasures more than God,
may come to better thought:

I mean, that they may sin abhor
of every loathsome kind:
And that their chiefest joy may be,
from thence to wean their mind:

And with no less delight of heart
they wisdom may embrace,
Till godliness has got in them
a room and settled place.

Such shall it find a pleasure sweet,
their years and time to spend
In authors holy and divine,
until their life do end.

And such therefore may be full sure
the forenamed fruits to reap:
And to enjoy all good delights,
in measure and in heap.

If any think this too great toil,
and state of life too hard:
Let him again think, that full great
and sweet is the reward.

As for myself, with Solomon
this one thing I may say:
That I have had experience
of many a happy day:

Such as deceitful world does yield
to such as it embrace;
Yet never saw I pleasure like
unto this heavenly grace.

What did I say, Not like to it?
no, nor to be compared:
For one it yields twenty-fold
in pleasure and reward.

And lest I should be thought to say
(like to the poets vain)
More than the truth in praise thereof,
and so should seem to feign:

Full many a thousand, even of them
who have their time ill spent,
And unto vain delights their years
and all their strength have lent:

And have not chose the better part
in wisdom for to grow;
Have cried out fearfully at length,
and said: It has been so.

All pleasure, 'folly' they did call,
which heretofore they found:
And sorrowed, that they had no part
in that which was most sound.

They have cried out of idle life
and of their youth misspent:
That to the reading of good books
their hearts they have not bent.

For what though men should set themselves
to seek a pleasant life:
In all things, ease and peace to find,
and to be void of strife?

Full true it is, that without this
their pleasure is but pain:
Right soon it shall depart from them
and sorrow come again.

Where are the mighty and the proud
and flaunting ones become?
Some 100 years ago they died,
and such as had their room.

The rolls of kings and princes great
and chronicles of late,
Record to us full many a one
who lived in pomp and state.

A time they had, their time is gone,
their glory is decayed:
And sin to such as died not well,
a woeful hire is paid.

And as for men of lower place,
whom better we did know,
Whose crown was beauty, ease and wealth
and did in dainties flow:

Behold it is with them, as if
they never had been,
As if no pleasure or no pomp
of theirs had once been seen.

And such as do remain as yet,
and live as they have done,
Shalt find the same which they have found
when once their race is run.

So that small cause there is, we see,
 this kind of life to choose,
And for the same the savor sweet
 of heavenly life to loose.

But such as do in wisdom joy
 and take delight therein,
Shall have with peace a place on earth
 and greater gain shall win.

Therefore mine own desire shall be,
 to take this for my part,
The water streams and pastures sweet
 of God's word, with my heart.

And such as these few reasons may
 persuade unto the same,
I wish them that which to myself:
 at this that they may aim.

Then happy we throughout our life
 whatever us befall:
Thrice happy eke, when we go hence
 and God us home shall call.

Let the words of my mouth please thee
and thoughts of heart, oh God:
And in the same continually
let me make mine abode.

As have the days of sorrow been,
so may our comfort be:
That as we did not praise Thee then,
so may we now praise Thee.

The End