



*“But O how soon by Heaven  
 I’m call’d to mourn.”*

## Jane Colman Turell

Diary Entries & Poems, ca. 1727-1735

The brief life and spiritual strivings of Jane Colman Turell (1708-1735) come to us through her diaries, letters, and poems — as compiled by her husband after her early death at age 27 and published with funeral sermons delivered by her father (title page at right).

Jane Colman Turell enjoyed a privileged youth in Boston as the daughter of minister and Harvard president Benjamin Colman, but as a young wife she struggled with inner turmoil wrought by physical loss and spiritual torment. Her anguish over the deaths of her children, mother, and friends dominates the writings chosen by her minister-husband for his funeral tribute to her memory.

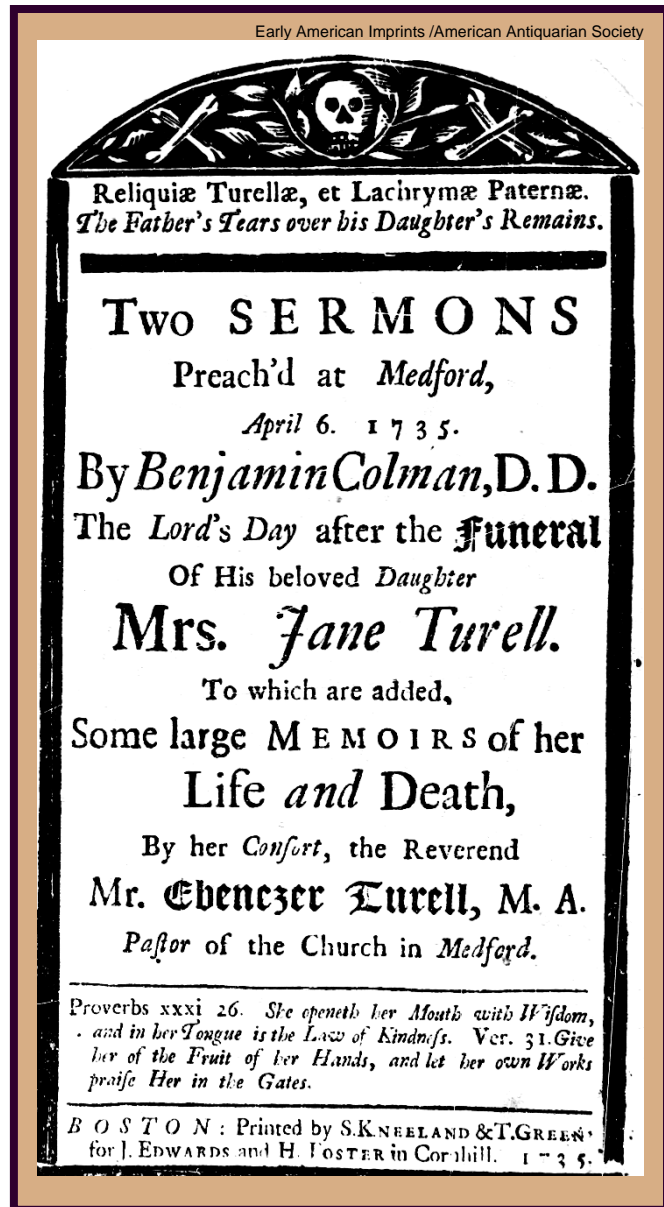
On her *first Child*, among many other Things she writes, — “It pleased God of his infinite Mercy to command a great Deliverance for me. — Blessed be his Name! Tho’ my Womb became as it were a Tomb to my *Infant*, yet will I not forget his wonderful Appearing for me, when my Senses were lock’d up, and saving me alive” — She knew nothing of her Delivery till two Days after it.

There is but a short Record of the Birth and Death of her *second Child* (*Clark Thomas*) who liv’d Eleven Days. She *pray’d for a Name better than of Sons and Daughters*. But all the Family remember the many *Tears of Joy* and Thankfulness she shed at the Presentation of this Child to God in holy *Baptism*, and her more than common *Composure* of Mind and Quietness at its Death and *Funeral*.

On this Occasion I find her Father writing to her, “I thank God who has carried you, my dear *Child*, with so much Courage and Strength of Grace, thro’ the Pains of bearing, and now of *burying* your *Infant*. He help’d you to offer up your Son to him in Baptism with so *many Tears*, and now to resign and commit it to the Grave with so *few*. May all Supplies of Grace be given in unto you from time to time, and the Power of it be always exhibited by you to the Glory of your Saviour, who has given you his strong Consolations against the Hour you have been call’d to pass thro’.”

On the Birth of her surviving Son, she not only blesses God, but receives him thankfully as an *Answer of many Prayers*, and writes, “*For this Child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my Petition*”

National Humanities Center, 2008: [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds). In *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell, Who Expir’d at Medford, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1735 . . . Chiefly collected from her own Manuscripts; published in Rev. Ebenezer Turell, Two Sermons Preach’d at Medford, April 6, 1735, By Benjamin Colman, D.D., The Lord’s Day after the Funeral of his beloved Daughter Mrs. Jane Turell. To which are added, Some large Memoirs of her Life and Death, 1735.* Some spelling and punctuation modernized by NHC for clarity. Complete image credits at [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/imagecredits.htm](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/imagecredits.htm).



which I asked of him: Therefore my Desire is that my *Samuel* be lent to the Lord, and be employ'd by Him in his Service in his Church. Lord do thou graciously accept of him, and furnish him, and let him do more and better for Thee than any of his *Progenitors*.”

May God graciously answer the Prayers and Desires of his *Handmaid*, and our *little Son* be greatly Affected and Influenc'd, when he comes to read and understand this *Paragraph*.



At another Time when she was delivered of a *Son alone*, the Surprize and Distress of which hazardous Minute every one may easily think of; she writes,

“Blessed be God, who has appear'd for me in such an Hour of Distress and Danger! I can never eno' admire the Goodness and Mercy and Power of *God* in composing me, and inspiring me with courage and Conduct at this Time. It shall be said, *In the Mount of the Lord it shall be seen!* — No humane Help was nigh, the Lord *was my Helper, and that right early*. O that I may ever be impress'd with a deep Sense of this Mercy.

There is a *Poem* also composed by her on some of these Occasions, and many other Passages in her *Diary*, wherein she declares she had laid hold on the *Covenant* for *her Self* and for her *Children*; and her *Faith* concerning them, and *Hopes* to meet them at the Right Hand of Christ another day.

The Poem I here insert.

**P**hoebus has thrice his Yearly Circuit run,  
The Winter's over, and the Summer's done;  
Since that *bright Day* on which our Hands were join'd,  
And to *Philander* I my All resign'd.

*Thrice* in my Womb I've found the pleasing Strife,  
In the first Struggles of my Infant's Life:  
But O how soon by Heaven I'm call'd to mourn,  
While from my Womb a *lifeless Babe* is torn?  
Born to the Grave 'ere it had seen the Light,  
Or with one Smile had cheer'd my longing Sight.

Again in Travail-Pains my Nerves are wreck'd.  
My Eye-balls start, my Heart strings almost crack'd;  
Now I forget my Pains, and now I press  
*Philander's* Image to my panting Breast.  
Ten Days I hold him in my joyful Arms,  
And feast my Eyes upon his Infant Charms.  
But then the King of Terrors does advance  
To pierce its Bosom with his Iron Lance.  
Its Soul releas'd, upward it takes its Flight,  
Oh never more below to bless my Sight!  
Farewell sweet *Babes* I hope to meet above,  
And there with you Sing the Redeemer's Love.

And now O gracious Saviour lend thine Ear,  
To this my earnest Cry and humble Prayer,

That when the Hour arrives with painful Throws,  
Which shall my Burden to the World disclose;  
I may Deliverance have, and joy to see  
A living Child, to Dedicate to Thee.

At other Times she pass'd thro' a great deal of *Bodily Weakness*, in the exercise of strong *Faith* and *Patience*, and humble *Submission* to the Will of God. The Times and Turns of her Illnesses she records, with suitable Prayers for Wisdom and Grace: Particularly, "That she may be ever in an *actual* as well as *habitual* Preparation for Death. "Let my Change be safe, and (by the will of God) *Joyful*. . . .

I find her recording her *Parents'* Sicknesses and Recoveries with Prayers and Thanksgivings.

The sudden Death of her *Mother* very much surpriz'd and affected her, and she has written *much* upon it. She looks back upon all her *Carriages* towards her from her early Childhood; calls to Mind her *Prayers, Counsels, Charges* and good Example; and earnestly begs of God to make up the Loss of her in Himself, and to take her up in the Arms of his Providence & Grace, and long continue her *Father's* Life and Usefulness, and that the *Prayers* of both her *Parents* may be answer'd for her and her Offspring.

There is also a short *Funeral* filial Transport written by her on this Occasion [her mother's death].

**S**He's gone! She's gone! I saw her rise  
And quickly gain the distant Skies.  
Sudden from Heaven a sacred Mandate came,  
Bro't by a Convoy of celestial Flame.  
She was prepar'd, the Summons did obey,  
And joyful left her tottering House of Clay.  
Her Pains, her Tears, her Fears, are all now past  
In Joys unspeakable which ever last.  
Her Soul in Jesus' Arms remain,  
The Grave her Body does detain.  
Parted a while, her Joys will be complete,  
When in the Resurrection Morn they'll meet.

Ah *dearest, tenderest Parent!* must I mourn,  
My heavy Loss, and bathe with Tears your Urn!  
Since now no more to me you must return.

O *Quickening Spirit!* now perform thy Part,  
Set up thy Glorious Kingdom in my Heart;  
That when those Sands which in my Glass do run  
Are spent and all my Work below is done,  
I the *dear Saint* may then in Glory meet  
Where Sin and Death lie vanquish'd at our Feet:  
Where *Jesus* ever will improve  
Our Souls with heavenly Grace and Love.

. . .

I go on to remark her religious noticing the *Deaths* of others. She takes notice of her Friend Mrs. *Clark's* Decease, and admires the *Patience* and *Long-suffering* of God in sparing her. In giving me (she writes) a *Space* to repent, and I hope *Grace* to repent also.

She records the Death of her Friend Mrs. *Wigglesworth*, with earnest Prayers to be prepar'd for her own, Lord, says she, let me be reconciled unto Thee by the Death of thy Son, and then the King of Terrors

cannot harm me. Let me no longer fear Death, since Christ has conquer'd it, and the Grave. Into thy Hands I commit my Self, living and dying let me be thine.

June 12, 1729. She writes thus, "This Day a most *awful* Providence happen'd before my Door. A Boy of about Twelve Years old was kill'd in a Moment by a Cart oversetting and falling on him. I was the first that saw it; and earnestly pray it may be sanctifying to me and my Houshold. May I never forget it, but as often as I look towards the *Spot*, remember the Shortness and Uncertainty of Life; and how suddenly, and unexpectedly Death may fall on us.

April 5. 1732. She writes thus upon a dangerous Fall of her little *Son*. O my Soul! Why was I so overcome and fill'd with Distress and Terror at this Providence? Where is thy Faith and Resignation to God's holy Will? It may be I have made this Child too much of an *Idol*, and my Heavenly *Father* has sent this Rebuke to let me see how soon I might be depriv'd of my dearest Enjoyments, if I dote too much on them. — The Use I would make of it is, to be more weaned from my Child, and dead to the World, and loosed from all Creatures.

Feb. 4. 1728. She writes on the Deaths of several worthy *Ministers* of the Gospel; the Reverend Messieurs *Thacher*, *Danforth*, *Waldron*, and particularly Dr. *Cotton Mather*; marks their *Virtues and Graces*, and excites her Soul to an *Imitation* of them. . . .

### Remarks on more publick Matters.

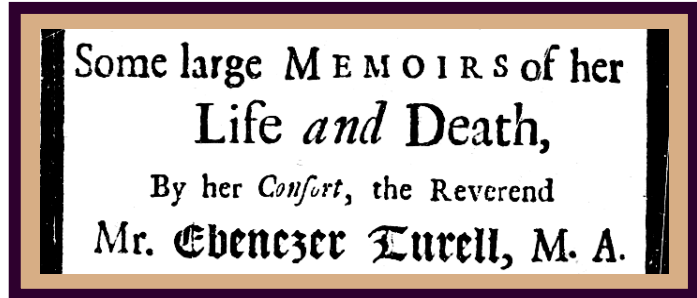
In her Diary she takes Notice of God's Judgments and Mercies to the *Land*, particularly his Visitations by *Earthquakes*, *Thunders*, *Lightnings*, *Storms*, *Drought*, &c.

She was among the *Mourners in Zion* for those provoking Evils which stirs up the Wrath of a righteous God & Judge against a wicked People.

I find her also taking notice of God's Appearing for the Land, granting *Showers* of Blessing in a time of Drought, July 3, 1728.

Some unhappy Affairs of Medford in the Years 1729 & 30, produc'd many Prayers and Tears from her, with the following *Poem* in Imitation of the 133 *Psalms*, which I publish as a *Monument* for and *Motive* to my own *People*, to continue in *Love* and *Peace*.

Behold how *good*, how *sweet*, their Joy does prove,  
Where Brethren dwell in *Unity* and Love!  
When no Contention, Strife, or fatal Jar  
Disturb the Peace, and raise the noisy War.  
'Tis like the *Ointment*, which of old was pour'd  
On *Aaron's* Head, and down his Garments shower'd;  
Thro' all the air perfuming Odour spreads,  
Diffusing Sweetness to the neighbouring Meads.  
Or like the *Dew* on *Herman's* lofty Head  
Which on the Mounts of *Sion* Moisture spread.  
'Circled with *Peace*, they shall within the Land  
As shining Patterns, and *Examples* stand.  
If *Sinners* wrangle, let the *Saints* agree;  
The *Gospel* breathes out nought but *Unity*.  
To such the Blessing from the Lord is given,  
Even *Life eternal*, in the highest Heaven.



Having related these Things, you will not wonder if I now declare my self a *Witness* of her daily close Walk with God during her married State and of her Retirements for Reading, Self-Examination and Devotion.

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## A D D E N D A

*Concerning her last Sickness and Death.*

**H**ER *Illness* began with *violent Symptoms*, such as Oppressions at the Breast & in the Bowels, which held three or more Hours in the Night Season; under which she cry'd to God *that Patience might have its perfect Work, and that her Faith might not fail.* — After some Time it chang'd, and put on various Forms, as is common in *Hysterick Cases*. For some Days her Complaints were chiefly of *Faintness* and Sinking of the Spirits, in the *Praxysms* whereof she often tho't her self a dying, *and would graciously resign her self, hoping it would be well with her.*

When *Fear* overcame her, and she was ready to despond, she would check her self and say, *This is Nature, and Grace cannot wholly conquer it.*

On the *Saturday* Night before she died she lay under the most wracking Pains in her Back, Shoulders &c. and in the Morning fell into a Degree of *Stupor*, which bro't on *Fits* by *Monday* Afternoon. . . .

The last Day of her Life (which was *Wednesday*) her *Frame* was proper to meet *Death* in, so long as she could be kept awake; and spake often of *its Approaching*; especially in the Evening. When I spake of praying, she desir'd me to be *short and sweet*, for she could not be long intent.

Her *last Words*, were, "*Thou hast deliver'd, thou dost deliver, and I trust in Thee that thou wilt still deliver.* — And *Death* is the *Deliverance* of those that live as she did.

Between the Hours of *Eleven* and *Twelve* (after she had struggled with two or three violent *Fits*) we apprehended her Change [death] would quickly come on. I therefore stood up and *Pray'd over her*, with her Friends; and in the midst of our *Resignations* of her, and *commending her Spirit into the Hands of her Redeemer* (without any Groan or Motion) she *fell asleep in Jesus*, and is gone to *everlasting Rest and Joy*. *The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, and Blessed be the Name of the Lord.*

