

**DEVOTIONS UPON  
EMERGENT  
OCCASIONS**

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Devotions upon emergent occasions by John Donne

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**JOHN DONNE**

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OCCASIONS**





*JOHN DONNE*

*ÆT. 44*

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# DEVOTIONS

Upon Emergent Occasions

By JOHN DONNE

Late Dean of Saint Paul's

Edited by JOHN SPARROW, Scholar of Winchester  
College, with a BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE by  
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Royal College of Surgeons



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## INTRODUCTION

**D**URING the last thirty years such interest has been taken in Donne's personality and his writings that his *Life and Letters* have been published, his Poems edited, *Selections* taken from his Sermons, his philosophy and the doctrines which influenced it carefully explained, and a *Bibliography* of his works has been compiled. Yet his *Devotions* have been strangely neglected, though they present a more vivid and intimate picture of Donne than anything else written by himself or others, and form the only short volume which gives evidence of his powers as a writer of prose. Within twenty years of its first publication in 1624 the book went through five editions, and it is even said to have been translated into Dutch; but for the next two hundred years it was practically forgotten, and only reappeared in three somewhat unsatisfactory reprints about the year 1840. These have become scarce, and it is now difficult to obtain any copy of the book.

Perhaps the fact most necessary for a true understanding of Donne's personality, and one which it is easy to miss completely when reading Walton's *Life*, is that despite all vicissitudes of fortune, despite even the apparent changes in his character, Donne himself was always essentially the same. "Antes Muerto que Mudado" was his youthful motto; and just as Walton mistook and exaggerated the change which took place

in Donne's character, so he mistranslated these words: "How much shall I be chang'd, Before I am chang'd!" and exclaimed, "If that young, and his now dying Picture, were at this time set together, every beholder might say, *Lord! How much is Doctor Donne already chang'd before he is chang'd!*" (See *Lives*, ed. 1675.) But Donne's Spanish motto really meant "Rather dead than changed," and a less blindly adoring worshipper than Walton would have seen in both Donne's portraits, that of the gallant young adventurer, and that of the Dean in his shroud, something that indeed would die before it changed. His passions were always the same, though in later life they became the "sanctified passions" which he speaks of in his sermons.

Indeed the outward change was very great; but it was not the point of view, it was the object of his outlook, that had altered. And the change was a slow process, which started with what Walton calls "the remarkable error of his life," his marriage. It began when he settled in his "poor hospital" at Mitcham, and gradually increased from 1605 till 1617, a period during which he was vexed, as Jane Austen says of one of her characters, with "a superfluity of children, and a want of almost everything else." Donne "almost spent all his time," as he says in the *Devotions* (p. 46), "in consulting how he should spend it." How bitterly he suffered during these years of poverty can be gathered from the letters he wrote