

Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

A MUCH-ADMIRED HYMN.

THERE WERE NINETY AND NINE

BY THE REV. D. MORRISON, M.A. OWEN SOUND, ONT.

ENGLISH VERSION.

There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold;
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold,
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?"
But the Shepherd made answer: "This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me:
And, although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep."

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed.
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,
Ere He found His sheep that was lost:
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick, and helpless, and ready to die.

"Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way,
That mark out the mountain track?"
"They were shed for one who had gone astray,
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back."
"Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?"
"They are pierced to-night by many a thorn."

And all through the mountains thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There rose a cry to the gate of heaven,
"Rejoice! I have found My sheep!"
And the angels echoed around the throne,
"Rejoice! for the Lord brings back His own."

This hymn is only about fourteen years old. It was one of the fruits of the great awakening in Scotland in 1873, in which Messrs. Moody and Sankey took so great a part; but though so young, it is already in the front rank of our modern hymns. Indeed, it made its way at once into great popular favour, and Mr. Sankey maintains that no one hymn that he was accustomed to sing was more signally blessed—that no one was more frequently called for—that no one had so many seals of the divine approval.

The hymn belongs to the ballad order, or narrative style—a style dealing with the great facts of Christianity—a style very common in the earlier ages of the Church when the people were indoctrinated to a great extent in this way, and were indebted more to the song than the sermon for their instruction. Who does not know that for the first two centuries creeds and confessions were unknown in the Church, and that for the next two or three centuries it was songs like this rather than sermons like Origen's that formed the chief *pabulum* of the people? The names of the earliest hymn-writers, for the most part, are unknown to us, but we know that St. Gregory, Bishop of Nazianzen, St. Jerome, head of the monastery of Bethlehem, St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and Hilarius, Bishop of Poitiers, had made large contributions to the Church before the close of the fourth century—nearly all of the narrative or ballad style, setting forth the great facts of the Gospel story in terms so simple that even the foolish could comprehend. Those found great favour with the people, so much so that Jerome declared that one cannot go into the fields without finding the plougher at his hallelujahs and the mower at his hymns. The hymn of Venantius Fortunatus, written 580, beginning with

Pange lingua gloriosi.

is a good specimen of the ballad order of hymns, setting forth as it does the story of the fall and the redemption of man in terms against which no objection can possibly be raised.

See how it runs in English verse.

Sing, my tongue, the Saviour's glory,
Tell His triumphs far and wide,
Tell around the wondrous story
Of His body crucified.
How upon the cross a victim
Vanquishing in death He died.

Eating of the tree forbidden, etc.

This is a specimen of the way in which the great facts of Bible story were popularized, and who does not see how admirably suited the ballad is for such a mission? The memory of such outlaws as Robin Hood, Rob Roy, Bonnie Prince Charlie and their adventures, is kept up to a wonderful extent in some lo-

calities in the Old Land, through the famous ballads in which such stories are preserved; and when one thinks of the crass ignorance of thousands of our poor people as to the great facts of the Bible, and the fitness of the ballad for popularizing such facts, he is led to raise the question whether it would not be wise to give a larger currency to such hymns as the "Ninety and Nine."

Many of the hymns of Charles Wesley and Cowper and Newton are too subjective in their character—too high for us to understand, too ethereally spiritual for common mortals, requiring an experience on their part which they have not yet reached, and for which they cannot be expected to have any sympathy. But in such hymns as the "Ninety and Nine"—hymns that deal with the great outstanding facts of Christianity rather than the recondite movements and fluctuating moods and frames of the believer, we can have no difficulty in securing the sympathy, the interest and even the enthusiasm of our people, high and low, learned and unlearned.

What an illustration of all this have we in the great Reformation of the sixteenth century! Who does not know that the hymns which that great movement called into being were religious ballads, set to well-known melodies, remarkable for their intensity and strong rich common sense? In those stirring days of a new-found freedom—when the Holy Ghost descended as of old, as with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and filled men's hearts with the glorious truth that the just shall live by faith, the ballad accomplished a great mission. It was the great vehicle of instruction. It was on the wings of such hymns that the doctrines of the Reformation made their way to the hearts of the people. Sometimes one hymn sung by a solitary minstrel whose heart had been touched with its power, would captivate a whole town; and before long another and yet another minstrel would be found to take it up, till the whole country, east and west, north and south, became permeated with the truth. Luther was a great power as a preacher, but he was still greater as a hymnist, rough and strong though his hymns were. His paraphrase of the Forty-sixth Psalm, "A Sure Stronghold our God is He," is called the "Marseillaise" of the Reformation.

Cardinal Thomas à-Jesus, his contemporary, declares that the interest of Luther was furthered in an extraordinary degree by the singing of his hymns by people of every class, not only in schools and churches, but in dwellings and shops, in markets, streets and fields.

We, dwelling in the light of the nineteenth century, on whose palate the sincere milk of the word is beginning to pall, can scarcely understand the joy with which people long enslaved, groaning under the *incubus* of Rome, who saw no mercy in this world except through a priest, and no escape in the next except through purgatorial fire, cannot understand the relief experienced by the clarion tongue of the bold preacher, and the strange sweet joy that took possession of the people through the ministry of song. And if all that can be said of such a state of society as that which Martin Luther represented (certainly not heathen—not altogether ignorant of the Bible story), what might we not expect were such hymns largely diffused through our poor people in town and county—still more what might we not expect in our missionary settlements throughout the world—were hymns of the ballad order, like the "Ninety and Nine," put into the hands of the heathen in which every man could read in his own tongue the wonderful words of God?

The hymn under consideration first made its appearance in a small periodical called the *Children's Hour*, now extinct (in 1873). In this way it was discovered by Mr. Sankey one day when travelling by train between Edinburgh and Glasgow in his evangelistic tour in Scotland. It occurred to him that in that land of mountain and flood, great factories in the west and sheep farms in the north, that were it set to appropriate music it might be turned to good account in the great work in which he and his companion were engaged, and accordingly he addressed himself to the task, with what success the world now knows. It was not long till these charming lines were sounded in the great Churches and halls of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and great was the power which followed. What with the plaintive air, so weird and strange, and the lines so new and sweet, so simple in their structure, and so rich in Gospel story, all set forth with a minstrelsy the like of which has been seldom

heard in this world—and a splendour of execution that took every one by surprise—and no one more so than the gifted authoress, at once became a favourite and attained an amazing popularity. It burst upon the country as a thing of beauty, and now it has taken deep root and filled the land, for you can hear its delicious strains wherever you go—from the milkmaid in the early morn, the fisherman on the lake, the shepherd on the hills, the mother at her household duties and the missionary toiling on the banks of the Congo. Such is the genesis of this lay of surpassing beauty; and if the question be raised as to its power in the way of quickening and refreshing the souls of men, we have to say that it has a glorious record. The testimony of Mr. Sankey has been already cited, and Miss Clephane, the sister of the poet, in writing to a friend of the writer of this paper, says there was recently published a tract containing the story of a young man's conversion, full of interest and fitted to do much good in its way. Then she goes on to speak of a neighbouring minister who at his communion seasons is in the habit of repeating the third verse:

But none of the ransomed ever knew, etc.

as if he could find nothing more appropriate for such an occasion. Once more, upon the return of Messrs. Moody and Sankey to this continent, they resumed their work in Northfield. The crowd was so great on one occasion that the Congregational Church could not contain it, and the whole audience turned out into the wide space in front of the building. Mr. Sankey and his organ were placed close to the church, the wooden wall of which, as he faced it and sung, made a splendid sounding board. As this great minstrel rolled out in distinct and sonorous strains the final verse of the "Ninety and Nine," there sat a man at his own door, some considerable distance across the Connecticut River. His family had gone to the meeting, but he would not be found fooling around after those crazy evangelists. There he sat in no genial frame of mind when the triumphant notes of the final refrain:

Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own,

floated on the quiet summer air across the intervening valley and dropped right down into his heart. Coming to him in such a way, the words were as a message straight from God, and he was awakened to deep and serious thought. Shortly afterward he attended a meeting, and verified the prophecy of the hymn.

The Lord brought back His own.

But numerous as the instances are that may be cited in the way of illustrating the power of this hymn, the grandest is the favour with which it has been received by the Church in all its sections—its great influence in reaching weary souls that may have wandered, and that may be writing bitter things against themselves, fancying they are lost—that there is no help for them in God. It is precisely such a state of mind that the hymn contemplates; and when the prodigal, out of a true sense of his sin and the tender mercy of God in Christ Jesus, looks on himself as the lost sheep—out in the desert, sick and ready to die—he soon finds that he is dealing with truth that will prove spirit and life to his soul.

(To be concluded.)

PRESS ON.

This is a speech, brief, but full of inspiration, and opening the way to all victory. It solves the problem of all heroes: it is the rule by which to weigh rightly all wonderful successes and triumphal marches to fortune and genius. It should be the motto of all, old and young, high and low, fortunate and unfortunate, so called. "Press on!" Never despair, never be discouraged, however stormy the heavens, however dark the way; however great the difficulties and repeated the failures—"Press on!" If Fortune has played false with thee to-day, do thou play true for thyself to-morrow. If an unfortunate bargain has deranged thy business, do not fold thy arms and give up all as lost, but stir thyself, and work the more vigorously. Let the foolishness of yesterday make thee wise to-day. If another has been false to thee, do not thou increase the evil by being false to thyself. Do not say the world has lost all its poetry and beauty; 'tis not so; and even if it be so, make thy own poetry and beauty by living a true and, above all, a religious life.