

Stories of Gospel Songs and the Origin of Some Favorite Hymns

Optional Subject for Literary Meeting in May

IDELL ROGERS, CONCORD.

SACRED song has long been a favored medium of expressing the deep things of the heart. When Moses and the children of Israel stood on the shore of the Red Sea, they signified their deliverance from the hand of Pharaoh by the psalm of praise, "I will sing unto the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." Even since those far off days there has never been any great religious movement without the use of sacred song. Luther set all Germany on fire with religious zeal as he sang that grand hymn, "A mighty fortress is our God," of which he wrote both the words and music. So powerful for good was it that Luther's enemies declared that the whole German people were singing themselves into Luther's doctrine and that his hymns "destroyed more souls than all his writings and sermons." During the prolonged contest of the Reformation, we are told, that it was of incalculable benefit and comfort to the Protestant people, and it became the national hymn of Germany. The hero of the thirty years' war, Gustavus Adolphus, adopted it as his battle-hymn when he was leading his troops to meet Wallenstein.

In 1720 a remarkable revival began in a town in Moravia. The Jesuits opposed it, and the meetings were ordered to be discontinued. At David Nitschmann's house, where a hundred and fifty persons had gathered, the police broke in and seized the books. Nothing daunted the congregation struck up the stanza of Luther's hymn:

"And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear, for God hath willed,
His truth to triumph through us."

And triumph it has and still continues its widening way. This hymn is one of the strongest and most inspiring in our Canadian hymn book.

A few years later the church of God was thrilled by the sermons of John Wesley and the songs of his brother Charles, whose hymns are perhaps more extensively used throughout Christendom than any others. Several incidents have been narrated as having given cause for the writing of one of the best known of Wesley's hymns, "Jesus, Lover of my Soul." That which is vouched for by descendants of the Wesley family is as follows: Wesley was preaching in the fields of the parish of Killybegh, County Down, Ireland, when he was attacked by some who were opposed to his doctrine. He sought refuge in a near-by house. The farmer's wife, Jane Lowrie Moore, told him to hide in the milk-house down in the garden. With the milk-pail came down the fugitive, she tried to quiet them by offering them refreshments. Going down to the milk-house, she secretly directed Charles Wesley to get through the rear window and hide under the hedge, by which ran a small stream. Lying there in a cramped position with the cries of his pursuers about him, he wrote this immortal hymn. Descendants of the kind lady who sheltered Mr. Wesley still live in this house.

"I would rather have written that hymn of Wesley's, 'Jesus, Lover of my Soul,'" Henry Ward Beecher once said, "than to have the fame of all the kings that ever sat on earth. It will go on singing until the trump brings forth the angel band, and then I think it will mount up on some lip to the very presence of God."

At almost every union gathering of religious denominations, among the hymns used, "Blest be the tie that binds," is almost invariably found. Not very many perhaps, know the story of its origin. Rev. John Fawcett, the author, was in 1772 pastor of a small church at Wainegate, and received a call from there to a larger church in London. The wagons were loaded with their books and furniture, when their devoted parishioners gathered around and begged of their pastor to remain with them. "I cannot bear this," said Mrs. Fawcett, and her husband reiterated her words. They unpacked their goods and remained at Wainegate. The incident so impressed Dr. Fawcett that he wrote this hymn, commemorative of the event. We can imagine the feelings with which it was sung in his own church.

A hymn that most beautifully expresses the faith and submission of the trusting heart, and that has been the means of deeper abiding confidence in God for

had gathered together in great fear, their homes and their lives being threatened. Far away from friends and their native lands, the trial of their faith was made perfect, as they lifted up their hearts in the words:

"Though destruction walk around us,

Though the arrows pass us by,

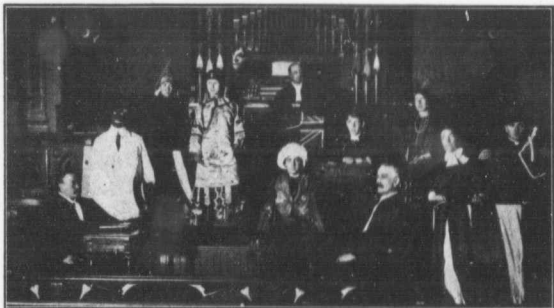
Angel guards from Thee surround us,

We are safe if thou art nigh."

Out of the storm and stress of life each soul mounted as upon eagle's wings and found abiding peace and safety in the secret of His presence.

"Onward, Christian Soldiers," one of our later hymns, has come to be popular as the battle hymn of the Christian church, inspiring us to follow in the train of the Son of God. The author, S. Barling-Gould, is said to have been unprepared for its great popularity. Whit-Monday is a favorite day for school festivals in Yorkshire. On Whit-Monday, 1865, it was decided that the schools of the neighboring villages should join forces. Mr. Barling-Gould says, "I wanted the children to sing when marching from one village to another, and could think of nothing suitable, so composed this hymn. The music to which the words are commonly sung was written by the celebrated composer, Sir Arthur Sullivan.

A child on the top of Mount Washing-



MISSIONARY MOCK TRIAL AT PARK HILL.

(See page 114.)

many a troubled soul, is "Lead, kindly light," written by Dr. Newman. This celebrated divine wrote this hymn in 1833 under peculiar and distressing circumstances, and just before he entered upon the Tractarian movement in the Established church. He had been to Rome and stopping at Sicily on his homeward way he became dangerously ill with fever. When recovered sufficiently he took passage on an orange boat for Marseilles, being under the impression that he must return to England and begin a movement for the reformation of the church in accordance with his views. The sailing vessel was becalmed for a week beneath tropical skies, and there, his body sweated with the heat and his spirit troubled as to his personal responsibility and conflicting views, he penned the words of a hymn that has been the solace and refuge of troubled, sin-stained humanity ever since.

"Saviour breathe an evening blessing" was suggested to Edmeston, a voluminous hymn-writer, and an English architect by profession, by a sentence in a volume of Abyssinian travels, "At night their short evening hymn, 'Jesus, forgive us,' stole through the camp." During the Boxer rebellion this hymn was sung by a band of beleaguered missionaries under most trying circumstances. They

ton was with her father above the clouds during the progress of a thunderstorm. Where they stood was all perfect calm and sunshine. The beautiful panorama of nature's handiwork so impressed the young heart, that she exclaimed, "I see the Doxology." All around seemed to her to say, "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow." The Doxology has been almost universally adopted as a praise hymn by all churches. Wilhelm Frank, the composer of the tune, "Old Hundred," was a German. The words were written by Thomas Ker, in 1695.

Much more could be said and written of these, a few of our favorite hymns, did space permit. In "Sankey's Story of the Gospel Hymns," to which I am indebted for incidents related here, may be found material for many a service of song or evening with favorite hymn-writers.

Centennial League, London, Ont., reports that two of their young men have this year decided to take up the work of the ministry. Concerning the ERA, we quote:—"The ERA should be in the home of all our people, for it is the brightest and best paper we have, full of helpful suggestions for our work." Besides their missionary givings, the League are giving this year \$100 to their new Sunday School.