

there too might be seen the soldier, high in rank, wearing the honours of his country, medals won on the bloody fields of the Crimea, hitherto, a stranger to God, but now no longer a stranger; and there too, many a Martha and Mary, cumbered indeed with many things, but in this grand hour seeking the one thing needful. And what shall we say of the sneering infidel almost persuaded and the fastidious littérateur, with notebook in hand, and shade of disapproval on his brow? And what of the superstitious Pharisee, the proud Churchman, faithful descendant of the class so severely condemned by the Master in his day? Very heterogenous was that assembly, so far as the exterior was concerned; but under the unifying afflatus of the Divine Spirit, nearly all, for the time, fused into one body and animated with one soul.

What was it that made the meetings of those distinguished evangelists such a success? The preaching of Moody? No. The singing of Sankey? No. Neither the truth as preached by the one, nor the truth as sung by the other, but the truth as taken by the Divine Spirit, and presented to the souls of men; and forasmuch as the truth is often more clearly revealed in song than in speech, we can easily understand how this hymn came to be such a power in the hands of those servants of God. The hymn is a paraphrase of one of the most stirring incidents of Bible story: the restoring of sight to the two blind men of Jericho, that could not be restrained from crying out for mercy when Christ passed by. It was their golden hour. It was not to be lost for want of importunity, and the story presented to us in the striking lights of the preacher, and revealed to us in the finer interpretations of song, kindles human sympathy, and when the hidden fire of sympathy is kindled in the heart towards the human actor presented to us in the sacred page, we come very near being caught up by the mightier power that lies back of the revelation.

"Brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God." In this appeal we can all see how deeply the apostle is moved. He himself is a revelation, or rather part of the revelation, and the words he speaks the remaining part. In Paul himself we have the human element; in the words he speaks, the divine. So also in the case of the two blind men under consideration. They themselves, and the way they act in view of blessings brought to their door, are a revelation—a part of a revelation, and the words they speak the remaining part. In one sense both elements are divine, for both are under divine guidance, and become matters of divine record; but it is first with the human speaker that the soul takes to do, and then with the divine worker. First the mind moves along on the lower level of human sympathy, and then this human sympathy is taken up by the divine worker, and that mysterious blending takes place, which issues in whatsoever things are honest and lovely and of good report. Now it is this human element in the Bible that lends to all its narratives, its histories and psalms and songs, such a fascination, and it is just here where we find our explanation of the power of this wonderful hymn. It is not in its poetry, its rhythm, or in its rhetoric. In all these respects it is nothing beside Moore's Irish songs, or Campbell's polished lines. It is not in such things that its power lies, but in this: it is a translation of one of the most touching incidents of Bible story, and as such it is

fitted to lift our sympathy heavenward, and bring us into communion with that good Spirit that leads unto all truth. The charm of song, the power of numbers, the novel scenes, the excitement and the crowd may count for something; but the great factor is He who often chooses the weak things of this world to confound the mighty, and base things and things despised, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

As to the origin of the hymn—the circumstances of its birth—we have to invite the reader to go back some twenty-three years—to the spring of 1864—to a great season of religious awakening in the city of Newark, N. J. The streets were crowded from day to day, and the largest churches were too small to contain the growing numbers. Among those most deeply moved by the impressive scenes and services of that time was a young Scotch girl, a Sabbath school teacher, one who, for the first time realized the powers of the world to come, and the grandness of the great salvation. As descriptive of what was passing around her, but with no desire for publicity, still, with the great desire of reaching some soul unsaved, especially among her youthful charge, she wrote the lines, beginning with "What means this eager," etc. Sensitive and retiring in an unusual degree, anything like the fame of authorship was far from her thoughts—anything like writing a hymn for general use in the Church never entered her mind; but the hymn having been published in a local paper, the Rev. E. P. Hammond, the chief actor in those interesting scenes, seized upon it, and added it to a collection of hymns he was then compiling, and soon after published it under the title of the "New Praises of Jesus."

It is a strange providence that watches over the birth of the great hymns of the Church. How obscure the fountains, how wonderful the stream. How little did young R. Heber know what he was doing when hastily writing "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," in the vicarage of St. Asaph, to be sung a few hours afterward on a missionary occasion; or Isaac Watts, when he wrote "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," as a fitting peroration to a sermon on that subject which he was to deliver next day to a handful of worshippers in a small Congregational Church in London. Long since the sermon has been forgotten, and the worshippers gathered to their fathers; but this great hymn, like a crystal stream from the hills, goes singing along the ages,—a means of light and cheer to thousands. In such cases man is utterly unconscious of the mighty power that has taken hold of him. At such times he builds better than he knows, sets in motion powers of which he has no conception—powers that God will own and bless—that He will take up amid the redeeming agencies of the cross, and carry forward through all time. What an illustration of this unconsciousness on the part of the writer of the hymn under consideration! With no idea of doing a fine thing, or writing a hymn to which a high place would be assigned by hymnologists, she takes her yet unpractised pen in her hand, and writes, anonymously, from the fulness of a heart that the Lord had blessed—writes simply what her eyes had seen and her ears had heard, in the hope that some that were dear to her might become sharers in her joy, and behold what God has wrought.

It was first sung to the tune of "Sweet Hour of Prayer," then to one composed by P. P. Bliss, and