

Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

THE SOUL'S PRAYER.

Oh Lord I withhold not from us any good
Nor ought of ill;
No crowning joys of summer,
No winter in our spring;
For all alike are good, being Thine,
So all must be good for us too.
And which is best Thou Lord alone dost know.
The joy we long for, granted, to I becomes
A couch on which our soul takes selfish ease;
The sorrow that we shrink from, guides
Our wandering feet to higher fields
And nobler aims. The stair
That, ever ascending, leadeth up to heaven,
Is never trod by those whose life is only joy,
Therefore, O Man of Sorrow, choose that we
Whether in joy or gloom may closely follow Thee.

K. D.B.

ANOTHER WONDERFUL HYMN AND ITS AUTHORESS.

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

NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE.

This hymn is a little more than thirty years old; but there are few that have reached such a degree of popularity in the Church, and have met with such favour on the part of hymnologists and book compilers. Certainly it is not a new hymn to the younger generation, for they have been familiar with it from childhood; but to those of us who can look back over half a century it is, and we can all remember the charm which it awakened when it first broke upon our ear. Its power was at once recognized as voicing the best aspirations and the deepest experience of every true heart; and though deficient in evangelical sentiment and somewhat highly coloured—at least for dull, prosaic minds—at once took its place as a popular hymn and will likely hold it for many years to come. Its chief fault, as it seems to me, is that of countenancing the vulgar idea of local distance between God and the soul—as if the Great Spirit, in whom we live and move and have our being, were a mountain or a star, or some great power living away in dim and distant abstraction from all His creatures, thousands and thousands of miles away into the infinite profound—whereas God is not very far away from any of us, and is, indeed, in communion with all true hearts, as the ocean is with all the streamlets of the world. The hymn has faults as everything human has; but when we take into consideration its excellencies: its simplicity, tenderness, directness, the charm of its versification and the still greater charm of the music to which it is set, and, above all, its highly devotional character, it is not wonderful that, in spite of its faults, it should be one of the most popular in the language.

The authoress is Sarah Flowers Adams, a daughter of an eccentric but excellent man, who was also a *litterateur* of no mean name, and one who ably conducted the *Cambridge Intelligencer* for many years. Mr. Murray, of the *Star*, is my authority for saying that in 1841 she published a dramatic poem entitled, "Vivia Perpetua," and that she died in 1848. Her works were collected and published under the title, "Adoration, Aspiration and Belief," and among these the hymn under consideration. The precise circumstances in which it originated will probably never be known; but from the fact that the gifted authoress speaks of her *stony griefs* being transmuted into a Bethel, and a melancholy tenor running through all the lines, we judge that probably it took its rise in affliction—that it came into being under the pressure of some heavy stroke that had darkened her sky and all the promises of the Gospel. It is under such circumstances that the believer turns yet more earnestly to Christ, turns to Him as really as morning flowers, dripping with dew, turn to the rising sun, and says:

"Nearer, my God, to Thee."

Such language, "Nearer, my God, to Thee," may be thought by some too high, too ethereal for common minds, and the whole set down as overdrawn; but this will not be the case with him who has felt the plague of his own heart, the need of a stronger arm than one of flesh—one who knows how to hold communion with God when all is dark, and has tasted the strange, sweet joy which comes from reconciliation. God is near! How do you know God is near? is the language of a hard materialistic philosophy. Perhaps the best answer is to say: How do the trees know when spring comes? How do the flowers know when the sun rises? How does the instrument know when the hand of the master is laid on it? It knows; it responds. Even so the soul feels the presence of the Divine Spirit—the force of His truth that sweeps over its strings, the warmth of His love that is shed abroad in the heart, the cheering, sanctifying light vouchsafed to its faith and understanding.

It was not in the lifetime of Miss Adams that this hymn was published. That was the doing of another. That took place some time after her death, probably about 1850, when her pen had been laid aside, when

her hand had lost its cunning, and the fair young spirit that inspired it had taken its departure to join in the choir of the blessed. She was content to write the hymn and place it (shall I say?) in her album where it slumbered for years, slumbered till God in His providence brought it forth from its hiding place, and now the whole land is filled with the fragrance.

I had prepared a Latin translation of it after the model of the mediæval hymns, but having seen one in the *Presbyterian* lately, by Mr. M. G., Brantford, which I like better, I would ask you to accept of it instead, and republish it in connection with this article. The English version is so well known that it is not necessary to present it also.

I.
Propior, Deus, Te!
Propior Te!
Etsi gravis crux sit
Quæ exaltat me,
Semper carmen erit,
Propior, Deus, Te!
Propior Te!

II.
Etsi, velut errans,
Occaso sole,
Supra me tenebre,
Lectus lapis;
Et in somniis sim
Propior, Deus, Te!
Propior Te!

III.
Hic viam dirigas
Gratus ad cælum;
Omnia Tu mittis,
Gratiâ data:
Me allecturi angeli,
Propior, Deus, Te!
Propior Te!

IV.
Tum mane cogitans
Laudes canam;
Ex merore discens,
Bethel struam;
Ut sim doloribus
Propior, Deus, Te!
Propior Te!

V.
Aut si ala letante,
Cælos findo,
Omne sidus supra,
Sursum volo;
Semper carmen erit,
Propior, Deus, Te!
Propior Te!

EXPOSITORY BIBLE READINGS FOR COTAGE PRAYER MEETINGS AND SOCIAL GATHERINGS.

BY REV. J. A. R. DICKSON, B.D.

The Christian Soldier's Armour.—Eph. vi. 12-18.

TRUTH.

The loose, flowing robes of the Orientals are gathered together and held fast, so as not to entangle the feet, by the girdle. The girdle binds up the body and makes it compact, so that a man can handle himself with ease. It imparts also a sense of strength. What the girdle does for the physical frame the Word of God does for the spiritual nature. Compare 1 Kings xviii. 46, 2 Kings iv. 29 and 1 Peter i. 13. It, therefore, fits one for the service of God. Girded with truth we stand ready for the journey and the warfare of life. We are ready to go out to do what God wills, as were the Hebrews when they had feasted on the paschal lamb, and stood with girded loins and staves in hand waiting the word of command. (Exodus xii. 11.) Let us see, then, the purposes the truth serves for the Christian soldier, by its revelation of principles and precepts.

I. *It makes him wise.*—Ps. cxix. 98, 130; 2 Tim. iii. 15; Ps. xix. 7; Rom. xvi. 19.

II. *It makes him holy.*—1 Peter i. 22; John xvii. 17; John viii. 32; Ps. cxix. 1.

III. *It makes him strong.*—Eccles. vii. 19; 1 John ii. 14; Col. i. 10, 11; Ephes. vi. 10.

IV. *It makes him patient.*—Rom. xv. 4; Ps. cxix. 81, 83; Heb. x. 36; James v. 7, 11; 1 Peter i. 13.

V. *It enlarges his life.*—Ps. cxix. 50, 93; Prov. xiii. 14; Ps. xviii. 19-21; John vii. 17.

VI. *It comforts him.*—Ps. cxix. 143; 1 Cor. xiv. 31; Ps. cxix. 50, 53; 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

We have, in respect to all this, reason for praise, in that God reveals the truth abundantly to His saints (Jer. xxxiii. 6); and reason for unceasing prayer, in that God offers the Spirit, who guides into all truth, to those who ask for Him (John xvi. 13 and Luke xi. 13).

THERE was sound, though unintended, philosophy in the misreading of the old negro preacher who sang, "Judge not the Lord by feeble saints." And yet this is precisely what the great majority of unconverted men are foolishly doing.

THE BLESSED WORD.

I have heard some express the thought that perhaps the things of God might lose their freshness by our familiarity with them. I think the reverse will turn out to be the case, if the familiarity be that of a sanctified heart. In other things familiarity may breed contempt, but in the things of God familiarity breeds adoration. The man who does not read the Bible much is the man who has a scant esteem for it; but he that studies it both day and night is the very man who will be impressed by its infinitude of meaning till he be ready to cry with Jerome: "I adore the infinity of Scripture." He that prays most loves prayers most, and he that in sincerity is most occupied with the praises of God is the person who wishes that he could praise God day and night without ceasing.

You may drink at other wells till you are no longer thirsty, but, strange to say, this all-quenching water nevertheless produces a much deeper thirst after its own self. He that eats of the "bread of heaven" shall hunger for no other, but shall grow ravenous for this. His capacity for feeding upon it shall be increased by that which he has fed upon, and whereas, at first, the crumbs from under the table might have satisfied him when he knows himself to be a child, he wishes for everything that is set upon the table.

Oh, what a blessing it is to get right deep down into God's Word, for that Word is ever new and the source of new thoughts in those who feed upon it! This is the book of "yesterday, to-day and forever." The book, though many of its verses were written thousands of years ago, is new as if it were only written yesterday. From the mouth of God the promises come at this moment full of life, and freshness and power. Come to it; it is all yours, every acre of this blessed land of Canaan is yours, and will yield you corn and wine and oil. There is not a star in the great firmament of Scripture but shines for you—not a text in all this mighty treasury of God but you may take it, and spend it, and live upon the produce thereof. You shall be anointed with fresh oil. God Himself is with you and He is ever full. God Himself is with you and He is ever living. God Himself is with you and He is ever fresh, and He shall refresh your spirit. . . . Come and eat the new corn of the land and drink the new wine of the kingdom, and the Lord make you glad in His house of prayer for Jesus' sake. Amen. C. H. Spurgeon.

ACQUAINTED WITH THE AUTHOR.

An agnostic, on learning that a distinguished and intelligent lady was a believer in the Holy Scriptures, professed to be surprised, and asked her, "Do you believe the Bible?"

"Most certainly I do," was the reply.

"Why do you believe it?" he inquired again.

"Because I am acquainted with the Author."

This was her testimony, and all his talk about the unknown and the unknowable went for nothing in view of the calm confidence born of her personal acquaintance with God.

NEEDLESS FEARS.

The Saviour said to His disciples, "Be not afraid." There is no reason to fear anything but the displeasure of God. Fears often stand in the way of successful effort. Such fears are unreasonable, provided we are doing the will of God. God's will is infinitely wise. Wise action is the condition of success. Let a man ask counsel of God, let him seek to do the will of God in all things, and he will secure such a measure of success as God sees best for him. With this he ought to be content. His heavenly Father's will is better for him than would be the attainment of his own desires.

Perhaps the pestilence is abroad in the land; may he not reasonably fear lest he should become a victim? Can he help being afraid? Yes; the hairs of his head are numbered. He has nothing to do but duty. When doing his duty, he is just where God would have him to be. A man cannot be safer than when he is where God would have him to be, and is doing what God would have him to do.

Death stares him in the face; may he not be afraid of the "king of terrors"? No, for Christ says that He and His Father will take up their abode with those who love Him. They will not take their departure as death approaches. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God."

Perfect love casteth out fear. We are under obligation to love God with all the heart. When we are cultivating love, we are guarding against fear. When we are in right relations to God, we have no right to fear anything but His displeasure.

The impenitent man has every reason to fear. God, though waiting to be a friend of the penitent, will not clear the guilty. Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne. There is no promise in the Bible for the impenitent. There remaineth a fearful looking for of judgment.