

Northern Messenger

VOLUME XXXIX. No. 50

MONTREAL, DECEMBER 9, 1904.

40 Cts. Per Annum Post-Paid

Wm Bronscombe 330-06

Hymn Stories.

(Hezekiah Butterworth, in the 'Christian Endeavor World.')

'ROCK OF AGES.'

This hymn was written by Augustus Toplady, a gifted and accomplished man, after his conversion, which was influenced by the sermon of a lay preacher in Ireland, whom he heard in a barn.

'How strange it is,' he said, 'that I who have listened to the best English pulpits should be brought to the light of the truth by a wandering preacher, who could scarcely read his Bible!'

This was a favorite hymn of the Prince Consort. When dying, the Prince quoted it.

'I have wealth, power and fame,' he said in that testing hour, 'but, if these were all that I had had, what would I have now?' He added,

'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee.'

It was the favorite hymn of Gladstone. He once kept his Christian temper, when being assailed in the House of Commons, by translating it into other languages.

'Sing, sing,' he said to one of his family, in a paroxysm of pain in his last sickness.

'What shall we sing?' was asked.

'Rock of Ages,' was the answer.

The hymn voiced his life and the ground of his hope,—

'Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.'

A BALLAD THAT REACHED THE HEART.

'There's a land that is fairer than day,' sang an evangelist to a crowd of street children in Salem Street, Boston. His face then brightened—

'And by faith we can see it afar.'

The words were beautiful, but the trust went to the heart.

The street was full of people who had come to the place on immigrant ships. Many were Jews; some were Poles; some were Italians and Portuguese.

The chorus rang out,

'In the sweet by and by.'

The words were almost childish, but they pictured the inward longing. They raised a vision of a better life. The street children took it up; the little Jews, the Portuguese, the Italians, the old withered men and women.

They all wished to share the hope of a better life, the young in their pinched homes, who found little in life but their playground on the doorsteps, and the old after their voyage.

The song went on. The doorsteps seemed singing, and the street evangelist began to preach. There was silence. The wanderers who had gathered from many lands were eager to listen to what he had to say about the 'land that was fairer than day.'

The ballad called 'The Sweet By and By' had a curious origin. The writer of the words, S. F. Bennett, died not long ago; and no one can measure the influence of this simple refrain of hope.



WATCHING THE FLOCK.

In our rapidly changing Western life it is hard for us to realize that in the East manners and customs and ways of working go on unchanged from century to century, so that the land of Palestine to-day is practically the same as when Christ lived. Still the shepherds lead out their sheep to the scanty pasture and watch to protect them from wild beasts, still the grinding of the wheat and the services of

the households are the same. This young Arabian girl watching her flock of goats on the hill side brings to our thought the shepherds on Christmas night. We wish the Christmas light shone into her heart as it does into ours, for we of the West have caught its beams, while the people of Christ's own land have lost it.—'Good Cheer.'

A writer on a newspaper after his death thus relates the story of the music of the song:

'The music of the song was written by J. P. Webster, of Elkhorn, Wis. He was a lovable young fellow, it is said, but could not get on in this world, for he had absolutely no business ability, and his health was far from good—in fact, he was a victim of consumption. Music was everything to him, and he composed many songs, some of which, like the now almost forgotten "Lorena," "Paul Vane," and "Little Maud," had become quite popular. Two or three times a year he was accustomed to go to Chicago with a roll of manuscript songs which he offered to the publishers at twenty-five dollars each. His most intimate friend along in the sixties was Dr. Bennett, then lately graduated from Ann Arbor, and trying to build up a practice. One day he went into the doctor's office in a very despondent state of mind.

"What's the matter now?" asked the physician.

"It's no matter," Webster replied, "it will be all right by and by."

The phrase struck Bennett, who had a fancy for writing verses, and he said, "Why not make a song of the sweet by and by?"

"You write the words, and I'll make the music," was Webster's answer. The doctor turned to his desk and began to scribble, and in less than a half-hour had accomplished his task. Webster had his violin, and after reading the lines drew his bow, and without the least hesitation played the tune that has since been sung the world over. Two friends hap-

pened in; and, when the composer had jotted down the air and supplied the other three parts, the four men sang for the first time "The Sweet By and By."

'Not long afterward Webster took a number of songs to Chicago. Root and Cady bought all of them but one, and that was "The Sweet By and By," which they said they didn't think worth publishing. Then he went to Lyon and Healy's, where Pratt, who had known him for several years, introduced him to the junior member of the firm. Mr. Healy, after hearing the new song played on the piano, offered twenty dollars for it, which Webster immediately accepted. "Poor fellow," said Healy, after he had gone, "I didn't have the heart to send him away without taking it." This was in 1867. A small edition of the song was printed in the cheapest form and placed on the retail counter; but nobody wanted it, and after a time, not a dozen copies having been sold, the whole lot was consigned to an obscure corner in the wholesale department, where it remained uncalled for for a year or more.'

The rejected manuscript contained something which answered the hunger of the soul. It was published in a western Sunday-school book, and there came a demand for the book containing the song.

Then it went over the world, and turned into almost universal experience. It was translated into other languages, sung on ships, and in evangelistic work everywhere. The poorest soul has a saving remnant, and loves to hope. So it trembled on the lips of outcasts who wished they could reform.

It does one good to sing of heaven, home at