

## Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

### THE NINETIETH PSALM.

THE GRANDEST HYMN IN THE LANGUAGE.

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ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY DR. WATTS.

O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home:

Beneath the shadow of Thy throne  
Thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,  
And our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,  
Or earth received her frame,  
From everlasting thou art God,  
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight  
Are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night  
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly forgotten, as a dream  
Dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,  
Our hope for years to come,  
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,  
And our eternal home.

The original is the oldest poem in the world—probably 4,000 years old, and it is with the original that I am going to deal, and not the translation as given by Dr. Watts, excellent as that translation is. It was written by Moses, written in the wilderness while conducting the Israelitish nation to the Promised Land. It has a melancholy strain from beginning to end, and when we consider the circumstances of its genesis it is not wonderful that it should have a melancholy strain. Moses had been thinking of man's little day, in contrast with the eternal ages of the Most High—his own checkered life and the strange career of the nation with which he was identified—the sins and sorrows that had marked their progress ever since they had left the shores of the Red Sea—how rebellion after rebellion had broken out in their ranks—how disaster after disaster had overtaken them—how their tribes had been thinned by the battle-axe of the enemy, and still more by the judgments of the Almighty, and how that for the most part the sands of the desert were to be their grave.

The younger generation—those that were under twenty years when they left Egypt—might pass over the flood, find a home on the other side, settle down in that lovely land which had long floated in vision before them; but the older generation, with the exception of the famous two, Caleb and Joshua, were doomed—all doomed to lie down and die and leave their bones to bleach in the desert, for God had sworn in His wrath that they should never enter into His rest. This was the heavy doom that was resting on the older generation, and no one felt it more than Moses himself, who was soon to ascend Mount Nebo and fill that lonely grave which no man knoweth till this day. Their journey was literally a funeral march to the grave. Hence the striking imagery of the text—the mountain flood rushing to the main and bearing all things before it—the morning flower cut down by the mower's scythe—the drowsy watch in the night whose slow hours slip past almost unconsciously—the tale that is told, the burden of which may be remembered, but the words—how soon forgotten!

Hence we can understand such language: "O God, we are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."

But the heart of Moses was in communion with the Eternal God; his eye was upon a far-off land and his ear ever open to its diviner minstrelsy, and so he quietly endured, seeing Him that was invisible. It was a grief to him that he had, on one occasion at least, forgotten himself and spoken rashly to the people—that he who should have been a representative, at all times, of the meekness and gentleness of Christ should have lost his temper, and said to the thirsty multitude seeking to drink of the water that flowed from the smitten rock: "Draw near, ye rebels," etc. It is not the part of the servant to denounce, to mount the judgment throne, and deal in vituperation. Vengeance belongeth unto the Lord; and the fact that Moses had faltered on this occasion was to him a grief, and the penalty that followed—exclusion from the Promised Land—was to him a sore disappointment.

ment. Much he longed to see the goodly land, and settle down with his people in its peaceful valleys. No! he must never set foot within its borders. He must bear the penalty of his rash speaking, and go up the mountain and die. It was hard; but Moses accepts the situation, holds himself in readiness to lay down the burden of life, and looks away from the things that were seen to those that were unseen and cheers himself with the fact that God is the dwelling place of His people in all generations. In other words, he says, We have been a base race, a stiff-necked and rebellious people,—bad material to form the basis of a distinct nationality; but there is the younger generation, let them pass over and take our place. They are not so deeply stained. They are more likely to be the foundation of a promising commonwealth. "O God, let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish Thou the work of our hands; . . . the work of our hands establish Thou." Such is the spirit of this grand hymn, and such the faith of Moses in that early day, than whom no one occupies a larger space in history or has won for himself a greater name in the Kingdom. We are not to forget his early life—his voluntary consecration—how he turned away from the grandest crown which this world had to offer to espouse the cause of his countrymen, choosing rather to suffer affliction with them than to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season. He must, as a contemporary of Rameses, have witnessed the building of the great Theban and Memphite temples in his reign, enriched by the spoils of vanquished nations. The sculptures and paintings of that great monarch, who was adored by the hawk and ram-headed deities, must have been familiar to Moses, and he could have been no stranger to the long processions of triumph over pale-faced captives—processions, moreover, of worship down long avenues of stately columns, huge monolithic obelisks. Great was the glory of the reign of Rameses II. and that of his son, the Pharaoh of the Exodus. But Moses turned away to a glory that excelleth and covered himself with a splendour which no smoke can darken and no time can change.

These are not fancy sketches. The son of Pharaoh's daughter must have witnessed these things, and stepped out from their imposing grandeur to witness the hardships of his enslaved countrymen. We do well, says one, in speaking of Moses' faith, to understand the character of the choice he made. History occasionally records the laying aside of absolute power by those who, having wielded it, have been satiated, wearied thereby (e.g., Charles V. of Germany); but history presents no other example of one in the flush of youth who quietly and persistently espoused the cause of the despised and the enslaved, rather than deck his brow with the grandest crown of this world. This did Moses, and he did it by faith, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. It was under the inspiration of such a faith that he wrote this hymn, and it is in the light of such a life that we can gather something of its far-reaching significance. It is, indeed, a wonderful hymn, and apart altogether from the fact that it is an inspired hymn—its great antiquity—its remarkable genesis—its poetic beauty—it has a strange power over the heart, stirring sympathies that link us to a far-off age and revealing the fact that faith in God and immortality, so mighty in these days, was just as mighty in that early day when it might be supposed that it could have hardly any existence.

Besides the English translation by Dr. Watts, I present a Latin one by another hand.

O Deus, vis preterita,  
Venturos spes annos,  
Nimbo asylum et nostrum,  
Eterna ac domus.

Sub umbra tua habitant  
Sancti incolumes;  
Et quæ tutela melior  
Eternis brachiis?

Priusquam fierent montes,  
Vel mundus lucidus,  
A seculo in seculum  
Tu semper es Deus.

Nam mille anni oculo  
Tanquam hesternæ quæ  
Preterit ac veluti  
Vigilia nocte.

Ac veluti amnis, tempus  
Oblitos mox aufert  
Vel vanum somnium noctis  
Quod mox evanuit

O Deus, vis preterita,  
Venturos spes annos,  
Nimbo asylum et nostrum,  
Eterna ac domus.

FORGIVENESS is better than revenge.—Pittacus.

THE aching heart may cease to throb when laid upon that softest pillow for human pain—"God knows."

## POPERY AND THE IRISH AGITATION.

The *Christian Irishman* says: The present agitation in Ireland will have an important influence on the future of the Church of Rome. Whether that Church will be thereby weakened or strengthened remains to be seen. For so far, we think it has had a decidedly weakening influence. This is conspicuously the case as regards the Roman Catholic Church in England. Cardinal Manning and others, as is well known, have long avowed their belief that the conquest of England by the Catholic Church would be almost equivalent to the conquest of the world. The prospects of such a conquest are not bright at present. A powerful check was given to the Romeward tendency of the High Anglican movement by the promulgation of the Immaculate Conception and the Papal Infallibility.

A still greater blow, however, has been dealt at the progress of the Church of Rome in England by the present Irish agitation. Men of deep religious convictions, and even of ordinary moral instincts, have been shocked and scandalized by the openly immoral principles on which the agitation has been conducted. We do not mean to say that the Irish people had not many grievances and wrongs, or that they were not warranted to revolt against these wrongs at the very first opportunity, concerting together in all proper methods to have them redressed. No one will ever find us speaking as if all the blame was on the one side. The people, however, allowed themselves to be led or driven by men who, with a few honourable exceptions, adopted low moral standards, or perhaps dispensed with moral standards altogether. As a rule, the priesthood have latterly given a direct or indirect sanction to these scandalously immoral methods. The Papacy itself has been more or less implicated. There exists, therefore, among the better class of English Roman Catholics an extreme revulsion against the principles, methods and aims of the Irish Nationalists. It is felt that not only are just rights of property assailed, but eternal principles that lie at the basis of all morality and of all religion. The divergence has at length broken out into an open feud. The *London Tablet* may be said to represent the one party—the "Catholics" as the Irish Nationalists sneeringly call them—the *Freeman's Journal* the other. This latter paper is now publishing a series of articles directed against the *Tablet* and the English Catholics. The tone of these articles may be judged from a few quotations. The *Tablet* is charged with "joining the ruck of Britons who declare that Ireland shall not have justice." "It is nothing short of a public duty to examine and expose its long course of injustice, duplicity and falsehood." "It is thoroughly and malignantly anti-Irish." "Written for and controlled by the aristocratic section of the English Catholic body, it practises the suppression of the true, and the suggestion of the false, with a skill so consummate that the presentation of Irish men and things in its pages becomes one gross, huge, monstrous lie." The *Freeman* deems it "our duty and our right to deny to this enemy the pretence of friendship, to tear from this hypocrite the mask of religion, to show to the world that the Papal approval (obtained when the paper was very different) is degraded by its position on the *Tablet's* front," etc. This by no means exhausts the *Freeman's* vocabulary of abuse; but it will suffice. It is plain that the Irish Nationalist have other dissentients from their programme besides the great bulk of the Protestants of Ireland. This entire controversy is fraught with evil omen to the Church of Rome.

## TIMES OF REFRESHING.

During the hot summer months the earth becomes parched and the fountains and springs become dry. Everything about us wears the look of anguish and distress, and all nature yearns for the coming rain that shall refresh the grass of the field, and shall replenish the fountains with water, and shall swell the streamlets and rivers with an abundant supply of nature's purest and best element. As in the natural, so in the spiritual world, seasons come when the Spirit is allowed to fade away and when the Church of Christ becomes like a dry and thirsty land. The zeal and energy lag and the work of the Lord goes hard. What times and seasons of joy those are when the blessings of heaven descend as the gentle dew and when showers of grace are poured out upon the Church! These are seasons of refreshing. They occur now and then. They come gently as the zephyrs in spring time. They fall upon us like April showers to refresh and replenish. That which proves the greatest source of spiritual good in the Church is not a loud revival like they used to have, but a spiritual feast where hearts flow forth in love and adoration to Almighty God. It is where the Spirit is at work in refreshing the members of the Church as well as awakening sinners to their need of a Saviour that these seasons of refreshing come. It gently moves from heart to heart and soul to soul, quickening and reviving the cold, energizing the lukewarm, and giving power and strength to the weak.—*Christian World*.