

Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

NOTES ON CHARLES WESLEY'S FIRST GREAT HYMN.

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O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread, through all the earth abroad,
The honours of Thy name.

Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.

He speaks, and, listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive;
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.

Hear Him, ye deaf: His praise, ye dumb,
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Saviour come,
And leap, ye lame, for joy!

LATIN TRANSLATION.

Utinam mi mille linguæ sint
Ut decus celebrem
Regis—tropæa gratia
Terrarum per orbem!

Magister meus, Rex, Deus,
Clemens, misericors,
Adjuves me ut edicam
Honores nominis.

Jesus! quid nomen abigat
Timores hominum,
Est dulce agris animis
Pax, vita, gaudium.

Is frangit suis catenis
Solvitque captivos,
Valebit ejus sanguis mi
Expurgans sordidos.

Is dicit, vocem audiens
Percepit mortuus
Vilem; quin triste cor gaudet,
Creduntque humiles.

This is the first great hymn that fell from the pen of Charles Wesley. He had indeed tried his hand once or twice before this (1737), but those attempts were comparatively failures. He and his brother John had about this time received a great blessing—such light and cheer in the Gospel as they never had enjoyed before. They had been visiting the Moravian settlements in Germany, and had conversed much with Peter Bohler, the distinguished missionary there, and learned from him the doctrine of a present repentance and a present salvation, and the duty of proclaiming this to the world. Before this Charles had enjoyed the Gospel; but the date of his full passage from darkness to light he makes May 21, 1737, and exactly a year after this he penned the hymn under consideration—superscribed: "For the anniversary of one's conversion."

It may be called the first and grandest hymn, and very appropriately it is placed first in that collection used by the Methodists the world over. This was the rise of a great volume of song—a volume which continued to flow for fifty years—till it has reached the number of 7,000, of which 4,000 were printed in his day, though little more than 600 are now accessible except to the curious. From the day he wrote this hymn till the day when his bright eye grew dim, and his feet, like the patriarch's, were gathered up in his bed, he was engaged more or less in adding to his collection, and it mattered little to him where he was, jogging along on his quiet horse to keep an appointment, staying over the night in the house of some friend by the way, or rambling by the sea shore, he was ready to jot down on saddle bag or table cover the delightful thoughts that were uppermost in his soul—thoughts that easily fell into graceful numbers and, having once fallen, remained so, for it was seldom that he retouched his lines, or recast his thoughts.

It is impossible to write intelligently of Charles Wesley without at the same time writing of John, the two great apostles of a revived Christianity—the one great as an organizer, the other as a minstrel, and both as evangelists; the one, like a battering ram, breaking up the formalism of the day, and the crumb-

ling walls of a system from which the glory had departed, and the other, like a fire, melting hard hearts, and fusing heterogeneous masses, hitherto strangers to God and to one another, into a common brotherhood prepared to witness for Christ, and count all things but loss for His sake.

Methodism has a wonderful history, and the fact that 23,000,000 to-day sing the hymns, and follow the rules of the Wesleys—that all their societies, large or small, throughout the world, bear their imprimatur—is evidence of its supernatural character, and furnishes an event than which there is nothing more remarkable in the history of the Church. Those brothers certainly did a great work in their day, and richly the Divine Spirit had prepared them for that work. They were polished shafts in the hands of the Master—scholars who had won for themselves a splendid name, and carried with them the air and the *cultus* of England's most famous university; and, more than all, they carried with them the baptism of the Holy Spirit in no common degree. Walking in His light, they saw all things clearly; for theirs was an intensely realistic faith, dealing with the unseen, and lifting them far above the level of the common coarse world, its temptations and its storms. Their eye was upon a far-off home, and the great realities of the eternal world, and their heart was in communion with God. This made them strong—strong to suffer or to serve, to live or to die, and to finish their course with joy.

The courage, the enthusiasm necessary for leading a forlorn hope—e.g., storming the Redan when the hearts of many were failing for fear—was nothing compared to the courage which animated the Wesleys when, all alone, they took to the meadows and the market-places, the highways and the hedges—when they mounted tables and scaffolds to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, and break up the stately formalism of the age. We wonder at it, and yet we need not, for the joy of the Lord was their strength. How with the light which they had—the glory which was revealed to them—could they do otherwise? It was not that they had taken hold of the Gospel, but that the Gospel had taken such hold of them that they could not be held back. They were urged on by a power not of themselves, but above themselves and independent of themselves altogether. There is a young girl connected with the Salvation Army of this town that has taught me a lesson. She had attended my ministry for years but, it seems, without receiving any benefit, and so became irregular in her attendance, worldly in her spirit, and finally disappeared from my view; but, at length, coming under the spell of a strange voice, and meeting with truth presented in a new form, her eyes were opened to the glory of the Master, the riches of His grace, the duty of a present and entire consecration. She took her ground; she entered into covenant with God, but in doing so she secretly resolved not to take a conspicuous part in the Army—not to walk the streets at the sound of the drum, and sing hymns to the amusement of spectators. But as the light became brighter in her soul, and the grace, that bringeth salvation, became richer in her experience, all this reserve passed away; and it was nothing that she should have to face ridicule and scorn and contumely. She was prepared for it all. She gladly took her place in the ranks, and braved the storm. Such was her feeling that she could not be held back, but rather desired to share with the Master the scorn of the world. I would not make this reference but for the fact that I have had sufficient opportunity under my own roof to verify the reality of the great change that has taken place—to witness a conscientiousness which is beautiful, a patience where formerly there was none, a brightness, a radiancy which sometimes mounts to a joy unspeakable and full of glory. If the Salvation Army were made up of such converts, what a power it should be in the world! I confess that this one case has done much to reconcile me to the eccentricities of the order, and that I never look upon the little handful of recruits on the streets walking under the beat of the drum, without respect, and thinking that there may be in its ranks bright spirits in daily communion with the Eternal.

Now the same feeling that led this young girl to witness for Christ in her way was the feeling that led the Wesleys to witness for Christ in those dark days in the manner indicated; and I cannot give the full *genesis* of this noble hymn without stating the

circumstances. What was the condition of the country when they took their ground, and opened their mouths in those songs so fragrant with the One Grand Name? Religious stagnation everywhere. England had cast off Romanism, but she had not yet taken heartily to Protestantism, and the Nonconformists, those early witnesses for a purer faith, were, to a great extent, silent, and Nonconformity itself, as if exhausted with its efforts, had lapsed into stolidity, and, in some cases, a frigid Arianism. In the Church of England, according to Burnet and others, the character of the inferior clergy had reached its lowest point. Many were grossly scandalous in their lives, others were caught in the meshes of the Arian heresy; while the greater part who came to be ordained were as ignorant as the people whom they were to teach. Professing Christians were paralyzed by the influences of error, and the existing ministry in all the Churches was powerless to attack the vices of society. The vitality of truth, the power of rebuke, the presence of the Divine Spirit, were lost, and the light in which so many had rejoiced for a season was gone. It was in these circumstances that the Wesleys lifted up their clarion voices, and broke in upon the death and dormancy that everywhere prevailed. From the day that they took their stand as the heralds of a richer Gospel than had generally been proclaimed in the stately churches of the realm, they felt that they had crossed the Rubicon, and that they had cut themselves off from the Church of England and every Church. This took place April 2, 1739, a few months after the birth of this hymn. On this occasion John met on Somerset Hill, near Bristol, with 3,000 people, on many of whom the Spirit of God fell, and to whom something of the Pentecostal fire was vouchsafed, so that on retiring to their homes they could say: "We have heard strange things to-day!" The dignitaries of the Church looked on with amazement, and wondered at their boldness; but the common people, to a great extent, heard them gladly for they delivered their message with all plainness of speech, free from the shackles and subtleties and jargons of theological lore—and that with all the spiritual fervour of a seraph—with lips that had been touched with a live coal from the altar, and the grandeur of an intensely realistic faith that often moved to tears those long unused to weep. They took the truths—the very truths which were so offensive in St. Paul's day—the very truths which were lifeless, and dry as summer's dust, in other men's hands, and gave them forth to crowds on the mountain side that were famishing for the bread of life. They broke in upon the slumber of ages. They shot their fiery darts all around without respect of persons, and strong men, convinced of sin, fell down in mortal agony, and from the multitude the Lord rescued His own, and made them witnesses of His power. What was the result? A storm of persecution that we cannot understand in these days. To name the Wesleys in polite society was an offence. To speak of their hymns and their singing was an impropriety. To waylay them and beat them—to make bonfires of their meeting houses—was thought proper. They were stoned, scorned, insulted, and in many places their very appearance was the signal for disorder and violence. A singular entry still remains in the parish book of Illogan, Cornwall, in confirmation of these views: "Expenses at Ann Gartrell's (tavern) for driving off the Methodists, 9s." This is the record of the fact that the churchwarden, placing himself at the head of an angry mob, drove the Wesleys and their followers beyond the parish boundary, and afterward regaled his accomplices at this ale house. Long and fierce was the persecution that those servants of the Most High had to bear, but they never quailed, never lost hope, never cast away their confidence, which has had great recompense of reward. Though beset with hired ruffians by the way, wronged in the courts of justice, insulted in every form, they never forgot their high calling, or the dignity becoming Christian gentlemen. John, the chief power in this great movement, is especially named for his high and heavenly demeanour during the long-continued storm. In his piercing eye and tender tones of persuasion, sometimes melting into tears, there was the very spirit of the Master; and on his calm, intellectual features, at once delicate and classical, we look in vain for any shadow of resentment—anything, indeed, but genuine benevolence.

Now these were the circumstances in which the