

THE UNITY OF RELIGIOUS SONG.

By Rev. J. S. Gilbert, A.M.

Theologians may quarrel over creeds, and split hairs in definitions, but when the heart speaks in the language of song, there is always and everywhere the same sense of sin, the same soul-try for God, the universal desire for pardon and reconciliation. Augustus Toplady was a contemporary of John Wesley, a noted English preacher, but an intense Calvinist, and most bitter opponent of Methodism. But he wrote the magnificent hymn:

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee,  
Let the water and the blood,  
From thy wounded side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure,  
Save from wrath and make me pure."  
Charles Wesley, like his brother John, abhorred Calvinism as a libel upon the Gospel, and believed it to be a gross misrepresentation of the character and purpose of God, but when he writes not with the pen of controversy, but in the language of the heart, sacred song, I e sounds the same note as Toplady:  
"O for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise;  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of his grace."

Bishop Heber represents still another phase of Christian life, far removed alike from the emotional character of early Methodism and the cold and barren worship of Puritanism, yet when he writes from the heart in the language of poetry, he is in most perfect unison with Toplady and Charles Wesley:

"Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,  
Dawn on our darkness and lend us  
Thine aid,  
Star of the East, the horizon adorning,  
Guide where our infant Redeemer is  
laid."

Still another school of religious life and thought was represented by the Quaker poet Whittier. The sect to which he belonged, repudiate all forms, even the simplest, rejecting as outward rites, baptism and the Lord's Supper. But Whittier joins with Calvinist, Methodist and Ritualist in slaying of the divine love as manifested in Jesus Christ.

"Well may the cavern depths of earth,  
Be shaken and her mountains cool,  
Well may the sheeted dead come forth,  
To gaze upon a suffering God.

Well may the temple shrine grow dim  
And shadows veil the cherubim;  
When he the chosen one of heaven,  
A sacrifice for guils is given."

There are many who in the Roman Catholic church, look beyond the incense and the images, the Virgin and the saints, and see Jesus, the supreme and real Saviour. In the breviary of a priest, who recently died, were found written these touching and beautiful lines, breathing the same spirit of love and devotion that glow in the verses of Toplady, Wesley, Heber and Whittier.

"When I am dying  
How glad I shall be,  
That the lamp of my life,  
Was burnt out for thee,  
That sorrow had darkened  
The path that I trod,  
That thorns and not roses  
Were strewn o'er the sod,  
That anguish of spirit,  
Full often was mine,  
My cherished Rabboni  
How glad I shall be,  
To die with the hope  
Of a welcome from thee."

Even some who have been outside the pale of Christian faith, in their struggle after God, have voiced such sincere aspirations and such a deep sense of sin and unworthiness, as to lead us to hope that the spirit of the, to them, unknown and unseen Saviour, had touched their hearts. Take, for instance, the following lines from Nachmanides, an Israelite and a Talmudist.  
"Thine is the law, O God, and thine the  
grace,

That folds the sinner in its mild embrace,  
Thine the forgiveness, bridging o'er the  
space  
Twixt man's work and the task set by  
the king.

"Unheeding all my sins, I cling to thee  
I know that mercy shall thy footstool be,  
Before I call, Oh, do thou answer me  
For nothing I claim of thee, my King.

"O thou who makest guilt to disappear  
My help, my hope, my rock, I will not  
fear,  
Though thou the body hold in dungeon  
clear,  
The soul has found the palace of the  
king.

Far removed in creed and religious  
life, in mode of worship and thought,  
from the six whom I have quoted is  
Mrs. Sarah F. Adams, but she has poured  
out her soul in a hymn of aspiration,  
Christians of all creeds delight to sing.

"There let my way appear,  
Steps unto heaven,  
All that thou sendest me  
In mercy given,  
Angels to beckon me,  
Nearer, my God to thee,  
Nearer to thee."

Have I not quoted sufficiently from  
the poets of different and widely divergent  
creeds and churches to show that,  
however, the intellect may be turned,  
the heart speaks the same language?  
There was much in the dying expression  
of Sir Walter Raleigh: "So long as the  
heart is right, it matters little how the  
head beeth."

SOME METHODS OF READING.  
THE BIBLE.

The great objection to reading the Bible in course is, that thus large portions of Scripture are for a long time lost sight of. There are several plans of devotional reading: (1) Reading strictly and only in course; (2) reading in course, but from two or more points of departure, beginning, for example, with the Old and New Testament, or with two places in each of these at once; (3) reading according to our need, searching out always those parts which suit our peculiar circumstances and spiritual wants; (4) reading just at random—ad aperturam libri. For occasional reading one of these plans might be pursued, while for our main, systematic devotions we pursued another. That we may adhere to the system adopted more pertinaciously, I think it is evidently better to read out of our regular course when we are casually away from home. If absence from home were habitual, we should perhaps do better by accommodating the course itself to this unsettled life.

Reading in course, according to either the first or second plan we omit nothing, we go over the whole word of God; and doubtless, for our main devotions, one or the other of them is best, while random reading is the worst of all. I am inclined to think that having about four different points of departure let us say: Genesis, Job, Matthew, Romans—so as to mingle the Old and New Testaments, and the historical and doctrinal portions properly, is the wisest plan. But probably from each point it is best to read consecutively and uninterruptedly for a week or two together, so that the interest and facility arising from unbroken continuity may be thus far preserved—preserved until change itself adds interest. Both sameness and novelty contribute, in their ways respectively, to our profit, and we may wisely secure, perhaps, the profit of both at once.—Samuel Miller, jr.

The way to heaven is too narrow for thieves and robbers and drunkards and murderers, as such, to walk in; but it is wide enough for all mankind to walk in when stripped of the fables and sins of this life.

LESSONS FROM THE PATRIARCH  
NOAH.\*

We are here shown the results of man's fall from God. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." He had made man innocent, and man fell when he lost his independent virtue. The story of the flood as told in Scripture is a most memorable part of the history of man, explaining the course of God's dealings with him. He is grieved that he made man, because men had become wholly at variance with the law under which they had been created. He used the powers of nature to destroy those who had made themselves the slaves of nature. The righteous government which physical things obey is thus indicated. God's repentance is reconciled with his divine, unchangeable will. There is a true and holy repentance in God, otherwise there could be no repentance in us, no salvation for us.

Noah, we read, was a just man and perfect in his generation, and the reason of this was because he was a faithful man, faithful to God. It is written, "the just shall live by faith." Both Noah and Abraham believed God, and so became heirs of the righteousness which is by faith, not their own righteousness, not growing out of their own characters, but given them by God, who puts his righteous spirit into those who trust in him. Noah was perfect in all the relations and duties of life. He was a good son, a good husband, a good father. He was faithful in all that was due from him both towards God and man. These were the fruits of his faith. He believed that the unseen God had given him these ties, had given him his parents, and his children, and that to love them was to love God; to do his duty to them was to do his duty to God. Are we following in the same path which Noah trod? Doing that which is right in the sight of God, rather than in our own sight, accepting the call of duty, and faithfully doing it in our generation?

There was something most wonderful and divine in Noah's patience and faith, but it was the same patience and faith which we are called upon to exercise, and which also is at our command. He knew that a flood was to come. He set to work in faith to build his ark, and that ark was in building for one hundred and twenty years. During all that time Noah never lost faith, and he never lost love either, for we read that he preached righteousness to the very men who mocked him and derided him for what they called his folly, and preached in vain.

We, too, have got to voyage over the water-flood. We, too, have to pass through many storms and troubles. Noah had a window in the ark, through which he could look as he held communion with God. Do we keep a window through which we may look up to God? Our help and strength and deliverance is all from above, and like Noah we too must look above, and like Noah we too must look above and pray. Have we such a firm set, enduring faith as this? We may have if we will; we must have if the final victory is to be ours. Faith ought to be much easier to us than it was to Noah with his surroundings. But faith always triumphs, for through it God is justified.

Never did any soul do good but it came readier to do the same again with more enjoyment; and never was magnanimity practised but with increasing joy, which made the practiser still more in love with the fair act.

\*Y. P. Society Topic for Sunday, February 10, 1907. Heb. 11:7; 2 Peter 2:4-9; 1 Peter 3:17-22.