

Pastor and People.

THE JUBILEE OF THE REV. HORATIUS BONAR, D.D.

"I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS SAY"

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Fifty years ago on November 30 ensuing, Dr Bonar was ordained and inducted into the parish of Kelso, one of the most beautiful in Scotland. Here his splendid ministry of twenty-nine years, as well as that of twenty-one in Edinburgh, has been greatly blessed; and his busy pen, alas! no longer that of a ready writer, still more. His published tracts, such as "Believe and Live," "God's Way of Peace," "Night of Weeping," etc., have reached an astonishing circulation—nearly 1,000,000. But, as Dr. R. F. Burns, of Halifax, says, it is chiefly as a Christian poet that Dr. Bonar has become the property of Christendom. His line has gone forth through all the earth, and his words to the end of the world. The hymnals of all the Churches have been enriched by his sacred lyrics. From no other author in these last days are more copious selections made. No voice more tenderly and truly gives the sentiments and sympathy of the seeking and sanctified heart. How can we ever forget such hymns as, "I Lay My Sins on Jesus," "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"? Dr. Bonar himself had a long period of doubt and darkness—"a night of weeping"—and when he emerged into the fuller light and purer joy, he was the better able to pen such hymns, and sing of the glorious liberty of the children of God. Out of the eater God brings forth meat, and out of the strong He brings forth sweetness. Out of the depths where the powers of the world to come are felt, and lessons are learned that could not be learned in days of soltiness and ease, the believer is raised to a life of grandeur and power, of which he had formerly no conception.

If it be asked what was the genesis of this hymn, "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say," the answer would be the night of weeping referred to, on which he has written so tenderly in the tract that goes by that title—a tract which has been a lamp burning in the chambers of many a suffering saint. The hymn has already had a wonderful history, and won many a seal of divine approval. To mention only one case, let me say that the last time Henry Ward Beecher was in his pulpit—March 6, 1887—he remained for some time at the close of the evening service listening to the choir practicing, and was evidently moved by their rendering of this hymn. While sitting and listening he noticed two street arabs coming into the church to enjoy the music also. He came down to them, and speaking to them tenderly he drew them to his heart, and kissed them! Whether this touch of humanity was due to the hymn, or simply the response of his deeply emotional nature in seeing two unfortunates before him with all their undeveloped possibilities, it is impossible to say; but of this we are sure, that the last grand utterance that he heard in his church was this hymn (and that he felt it)—"I Heard the Voice," etc.

But strange enough this grand hymn has a very obscure origin. The author has no recollection of the immediate circumstances in which it was written. As to the fact of its being the first of his own religious experience, there is no doubt but that he has nothing on record but a little scrap of paper without a date, and the hymn written in pencil thereon. Yet this same hymn, which first saw the light some forty years ago in the manse at Kelso, is now recognized as one of the grandest hymns of the Church through all the denominations. Only a few Sabbaths ago it was rendered in first-class style in Christ's Church Cathedral, Montreal, and looked forward to as the chief attraction in the services. The advertised notice ran as follows: "10th of Sept., 1887. There will be service in Christ's Church to-morrow [Sunday] eight a.m. Holy Communion. . . . Quarter past four p.m., Choral Litany—'Saviour of Sinners,' by Cherubini. Seven, evening service, Y. Stainer's in A. A. hem, 'I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,' by G. Couture. Preacher, Rev. Canon Norman. D.C.L." Away down at the bottom, in the region of controversy and fierce debate, Churches are divided and broken up into many parts, each contending, as is supposed, earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; but away at the top, on the sunlit mountain of devotion, they meet and mingle as the children of one common Father, and they will continue to do so till every passion is laid, and every disturbing element is cast out—till, in short, with clean hands and pure hearts they enter upon the nobler service, and engage in the higher ministry.

The Calvinist and Arminian both engage in singing "Rock of Ages," though the author and John Wesley were angry disputants in their day; and the Episcopalian and the Wesleyan both sing in their holiest hours, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," though the author was ostracized, and the church doors of the Establishment were closed against him; then the Baptist, the Presbyterian and the Episcopalian—High Church and Low—are now all ready to acknow-

ledge the author of "Jesus Shall Reign," etc., as the greatest name in hymnody, and to accept his sacred songs to guide their devotions in those moments rich in blessing, when they hold converse with God, though some of us can remember the time when they severally dealt heavy blows at one another, and how all united in hurling their anathemas against the little Doctor. More remarkable still, hymns purely Roman Catholic in their origin, and hitherto regarded as the exclusive property of the Roman Catholic Church, such as "Veni Creator Spiritus," "Jerusalem the Golden," and "Lead, Kindly Light," are no longer confined to the Roman Catholic Church, but are to be found in our own best hymnals, so that in spite of ourselves we unite with the Roman Catholic, and the Roman Catholic with us, in our songs of praise to the God of all our mercies; and still more remarkable is the fact that the Romanizing party in the English Church should make use of our Presbyterian hymns as in the case cited, and publicly advertise, as the chief attraction of the service of the day, "I Heard the Voice," etc.

Has it come to this—that creeds so divergent—voices so discordant—that Churches that have so long stood apart, in frowning attitude, are becoming more tolerant in regard to error, or more charitable in regard to duty? Yes, more charitable in regard to duty, more open to the fact that the Church of God is wider than the fold—than all the folds—that the Divine Spirit is richer in His grace and wider in His sphere of operation than we in our ignorance or bigotry have any conception of, and that He, in His saving and sanctifying power, is preparing hearts in ways and places undreamt of by theologians, that will be to the praise of His grace in the ages to come. The rose that blushes unseen in the desert is full of sweetness, but the sweetness is not all confined to the flower. For miles and miles it is casting forth its perfume and scenting the air, though there be no man to recognize the fact, and so also in the higher realm. The Church is good, but it does not contain all the goodness in the world. God is working in the great body of humanity. The Divine Spirit is brooding over the world, and is in communion with all true hearts and binding them in closer, holier bonds, and He will continue to do so till all existing organizations shall cease, whether established or non-established, Presbyterian or Episcopalian, and out of the wreck and ruin of them all, God will bring forth one great Church, shining in the beauty of holiness, numerous as the drops of dew in the womb of the morning—a Church fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.

One remarkable circumstance connected with this hymn is the obscurity of its origin—that it dropped, as it would seem, almost unconsciously from the pencil of the author—that he has no record of it but a little scrap of dateless paper, and no remembrance of the circumstances in which it was produced whatever—of so little value did it seem in his eye! But the same thing may be said of many of the Wesleys' great hymns, of the Rev. G. H. Gilmour's hymn: "He leadeth me;" of Mrs. J. Luke's hymn, "I think when I read that sweet story of old;" of Miss Cary's hymn, "One sweetly solemn thought comes to me o'er and o'er, I am nearer my Father's home to-night than ever I was before." We are accustomed to look for great things, only as the result of great labour, for grand success only as the reward of human wisdom and high born genius. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the mighty, and base things and things despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, that no flesh should glory in His presence. Great things in human estimation are often great failures, but anything done for Christ or His kingdom has the stamp of immortality, and however feeble or foolish it may seem, will yet be owned by God, taken up amid the redeeming agencies of the Cross, and carried forward through the ages. Dorcas, in a sense, is still making garments for the poor; and the penitent at the foot of Jesus has not yet poured forth all her precious ointment; and Toplady has not yet done with his "Rock of Ages"; or Dr. Bonar with his hymn, "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say," which he began, almost unconsciously, on some quiet evening in the manse of Kelso, more than forty years ago. These notes would be incomplete without some more extended notice of the author. He was born in Edinburgh, 1808, won distinction as a student in the university of that city, published his first edition of "Hymns on Faith and Hope," in 1856, and was raised to the Moderator's chair, in 1883, the highest position in the gift of the Church. "I met him," says a friend of mine, "a few years ago, and was delighted with my interviews. He was then a fine, genial old man, with full round head, a quiet, thoughtful expression; in short a charming man." And another, writing of his youthful prime, gives me the following reminiscences: "His name calls up a scene enacted many years ago when I was a divinity student, and he a minister of ten years' standing in Kelso." The occasion was an evangelistic service in a school room on a week day evening. "There was something about the service and about the man that made you feel that you were standing on holy ground, and that the service was far above that which usually goes by this name. To give you an idea of the earnest preacher and his great sub-

ject, imagine before you a youth of slender build, somewhat below the common height, with dark complexion, fine round head, surmounted with abundance of auburn locks, large lustrous eyes full of bright intelligence and strong emotion, and countenance well defined every feature indicating a sensitive kindly, nature—all 'sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought'—and you have before you a glimpse of the Rev. Horatius Bonar, D.D., in his youthful prime; and when you have read the outline of his beautiful discourse, you will see how true it is that the youth is the father of the man. His text was Ezek. xxxiv. 29: 'I will raise up for them a plant of renown.' He saw Christ in the text, the plant of renown, the plant of Jehovah's right hand planting; and he showed that it was renowned for being (1) a shelter from the wrath to come; (2) for its precious fruit; (3) for its beauty and grand proportions; (4) for its durability, its amarantine character. These were the strong lines of his discourse, and he held them up to us in all their grandeur and pressed home the precious lessons which they convey upon his hearers in a style which I, at least, can never forget." Here then we have a picture of Dr. H. Bonar, in his youth on the one hand, and another in his old days on the other, full of years and full of honours. Look on this picture and on that, and who would not say. Surely all flesh is grass. But while the outward man is perishing, the inward man is renewed day by day, because fed with richer communications from on high, in virtue of which he puts on the robes of immortality, and walks with a steadier step in the holy light that is with the saint in the eventide. O man greatly beloved, O H. Bonar, author of the sweet hymn "I Heard the Voice, etc.," we shall soon miss thee in thy accustomed place, and fail to hear thy voice once so rich and resonant, but we shall still sing the songs we learned from thee and take up thy name with reverence; and, encouraged by thy example, as well as warmed by thy ministry, we shall also press on in that narrow path you trod, often dark, but ending in light—ending at God's right hand where are pleasures for evermore.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast!"
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting-place,
And He has made me glad.

LATIN VERSION.

Audivi vocem Jesus:—
"O fesse adveni
Ut tandem requiescas,
Impone caput me."
Tunc tales erat veni,
Et fessus et tristis,
Asylum hoc inveni;
Nunc sum letabilis.

Audivi vocem Jesus:—
"En vivam aquam do;
O sitiens, ut vivas,
Inclina, bibito."
Adveni Jesum, et bibens
Vivende fluvio
Restincta sitis, et vivens
Nunc letor sum Illo!

Audiri vocem Jesus—
"Sum cæci Lux mundi,
Adverte, tibi ortus.
Et dies lucidi."
Adversans Illoc inveni
Et solem et stellam;
Illic luce peregrinus
Adibo terminam.

WHAT CHRISTIANITY DOES.

Christianity does not set men at any work of mere resolution, saying, "Come now, let us be humble;" that would but multiply the endless specimens of useless self-mortification. But true Christianity puts men face to face with the humbling facts, the great realities of God and His truth, and then humility comes upon the soul as darkness comes on the face of the earth, not because the earth has made up its mind to be dark, but because it has rolled into the great shadow. It is the narrowness of our life that makes us proud. You merchants would be proud of your successful business if you saw nothing beyond it; and you men and women proud of your splendid houses if you look no further. But if you could only see God forever-present in your soul, and your soul worth Jesus dying for, and the souls of your brethren precious in His sight, and the whole universe teeming with work for Him, then must come the humility of the Christian. To that humility let us devote ourselves, for in a humility like that alone is peace.

LOVE makes drudgery delightful. It forgets self, and lives for others. Love outruns law and leaves it far behind. Not to be able and permitted to serve is a penalty. The question is not, "What must I do?" but, "What may I do?" To give pleasure is its joy. To grieve its object is to grieve itself. It stops a nothing.