

## Pastor and People.

FOR THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN

### NOTES ON A MUCH ADMIRED HYMN.

"HAIL TO THE LORD'S ANOINTED."

BY THE REV. D. MORRISON, M.A., OWEN SOUND.

Ave, Dei Inundo  
Permagni Davidi  
Nato majori multo;  
Et gloria regni!  
Advenit ut frangat  
Oppressionis vim,  
Advenit ut solvat  
Captivum miserum  
Regnans justitiâ.

Sic pluvia in herbas  
Descendet in terrâ  
Et munera, sic flores  
Ortura semitâ,  
Coram illo in montes  
Heraldus Pax ibit.  
Tum æquitasque Fontis  
Ab collibus fluat  
Ad valles humiles.

Ab Arabiâ vel reges  
In illo proident;  
Et Ethiopis duces  
Splendorem venient  
Cum donis pretiosis;  
A insulis naves  
Profundent tantes opes  
Tributo ad pedes  
Beati Domini.

Et omnes civitates  
Aurumque tus ferent;  
Et tyranni diademas,  
Illoque servient.  
Ab ora usque oram  
Regnabit, ab amni  
Et terminos terrarum,  
Quâ ala aquilae  
Volare poterit.

In dies orientur  
Et thures et vota;  
Fines regni tendentur  
Tum ultra sidera.  
Proles educta Fonte  
Divino, nunc parva,  
Nutrient rores monte  
In numero herba,  
Et semper amplians.

Undique victor throno  
Sedebit inclytus;  
Omni terrâ et homo  
Beans, Hoc beatus.  
Ævi amnis non franget  
Statuta federa  
Amoris sed modo stringet;  
Idem per secula,  
Nam manet Dominus.

James Montgomery, the author of this hymn of surpassing excellence, was born 4th November, 1771, in the little Scottish town, Irvine, on the Frith of Clyde, a romantic spot and well-fitted for the nurture of the fair-haired child that was destined in the providence of God to be a sweet singer in Israel. Designed by his father and mother for the Moravian ministry, to which his parents belonged, he was sent at the early age of six years to Fulneck—a Moravian settlement near Leeds, England,—and in the excellent Grammar School connected with that institution he was taught the necessary branches of learning, German, French, Greek, Latin, natural science, etc. But James was slow to learn and his teachers gave rather discouraging accounts of his progress from time to time. But one fine summer day when he and a few more of the boys were taken to the country under the escort of one of those teachers he enjoyed a treat which made that day memorable. In a shady spot in the fields this teacher read to them,—with no idea that he was going to kindle a flame in the heart of the young poet in the light of which many should rejoice,—read Blair's "Grave." Young Montgomery was delighted. He mused much on the theme, and while he was musing the fire burned, and nothing could restrain him from versification. As his teachers despaired of ever making much of him as a scholar, he was sent at the age of fifteen to serve in a huckster's shop in the vicinity; but even there, amid the prosaic surroundings, he found time to write quite a number of poems, and among others that much admired paraphrase of the 113th Psalm, "Servants of God in joyful lays," etc. By and by we find him in a newspaper office—1792—assisting the editor of the *Sheffield Register*, and in full sympathy with his chief's radical opinions. Shortly afterward we find him editor-in-chief, following in the same lines, advocating popular rights and

throwing the lustre of his genius over all his communications. For his plain speaking and strong advocacy of radical measures, under the shadow of the French Revolution, the Government of the day threw him twice over into the cells of York Castle; but the poetic faculty was irrepressible even here, and shortly after his liberation he published a small volume of poems under the title of "Prison Amusements." He published the "Wanderer of Switzerland" in 1806, which in spite of the savage attack of the critic Jeffrey, in the *Edinburgh Review*, was [received with great favour—12,000 copies having been disposed of in twenty years, not speaking of the American editions.

He had wandered about for many years; he had adopted Socinian and other errors, but the remembrance of his saintly father and mother, who died in the West Indies, and who had given themselves to the missions of the Moravian brethren, was fondly treasured by our author, and the little despised settlement of the brethren at Fulneck was still a green spot in his memory; and though more than thirty years had now passed since he, a mere child, had taken up his residence there—though none of its laurels had ever followed him—though none of its calendars made honourable mention of his name, he loved it, and at length determined openly and fully to identify himself with the disciples of Christ; and so, at the close of 1814, he was publicly received and recognized as a brother in the Lord and a member of the Moravian Society.

It was on the forty-third anniversary of his birthday that he wrote the president of Fulneck, making his request for readmission to the congregation, and it was at this time he wrote those impressive lines:

People of the living God,  
I have sought the world around,  
Paths of sin and sorrow trod,  
Peace and comfort nowhere found.  
Now to you my spirit turns—  
Turns a fugitive unblest;  
Brethren, where your altar burns,  
Oh, receive me into rest.

Notwithstanding his success as a *litterateur*, he was poor; but in 1835 he was relieved from all anxiety as to a livelihood by Sir Robert Peel placing his name on the pension list for \$1,000 a year. Still he continued to be a voluminous writer (to the last—29th April, 1854,—when a stroke of paralysis spared him the pains of death, and made a way of escape for the bright spirit that had learned to sun itself in the eternal light. Like Watts and Cowper and Ken and Lyte he never married, and like them, too, he found his sweetest enjoyment in sacred verse and in a hope full of immortality.

Heard ye the sobs of parting breath?  
Marked ye the eye's last ray?  
No! life so sweetly ceased to be  
It lapsed in immortality.

"When seriously ill and far advanced in years," Mr. Duffield says, "he once offered some of his hymns to the attending physician, and that on his reading them to the sick man, he became very much affected, saying to the physician that every one embodied some distinct experience—adding that he hoped they might be profitable to others."

The poet in his later years visited Edinburgh, and Hugh Miller, then editor of the *Witness*, gives the following description of him:

His appearance speaks of antiquity, not of decay. His hair has assumed a snowy whiteness, and the lofty and full arched coronal regions exhibit what a brother poet has well termed the clear, bald polish of the honoured head; but the expression of the countenance is that of middle life. It is a thin, clear, speaking countenance. The features are high, the complexion fresh, though not ruddy; and age has failed to pucker either cheek or forehead. The figure is quite as little touched of age as the face. It is well but not strongly made, and of the middle size; yet there is a touch of antiquity about it, derived, however, rather from the dress than from any peculiarity of the person itself. To a plain suit of black, Mr. Montgomery adds the voluminous breast ruffles of the last age, exactly such things as, in Scotland at least, the fathers of the present generation wore on their wedding days.

A word now in regard to the genesis of this great hymn—the hymn on which his fame will chiefly rest. On the 14th April, 1822, there was a large and enthusiastic missionary meeting held in the Wesleyan Chapel, in the city of Liverpool, England. In those days the Church had little more than waked up as to its duty to the heathen world; and when a missionary meeting was announced, speakers of great name felt honoured in being called to take part in the proceedings, at least to a greater extent than now; and the Church as a whole took a warmer interest in this great question that had all but been neglected for ages.

Dr. Adam Clarke, the distinguished commentator, presided on this occasion, and among the speakers was the poet and *litterateur*, James Montgomery, now in the zenith of his popularity. He had made diligent preparation for this great meeting, and as a peroration to his speech the hymn under consideration, which he recited with grand effect to the great assembly. Dr. Clarke was so delighted with the hymn that he begged for a copy, and upon receiving it resolved to place it in his Commentary on Ps. 72, which he did. Now behold what God hath wrought! In his "Original Hymns," published 1853, this is No. 267, and is entitled, "Christ's reign on earth."

The theme of the hymn, "Christ's reign on earth," has doubtless contributed largely to its popularity; for there is nothing so directly appeals to all that is best and greatest in our nature—nothing so much engages our best sympathies—than the prospect unfolded in the visions of ancient seers, who from time to time were carried away in the spirit to behold and describe the glory of the latter day. Such visions do not only address themselves to our faith and hope, but our imagination, and serve in no small measure to lift the Church into a higher life and stimulate her flagging energies. Amid all her successes and reverses, the conflicts and confusions of time, the onsets of infidelity and the storms of persecution, this has been the hope of the Church, and when a hymn like this is sung, or simply recited, as in this case—a hymn so fragrant with the atmosphere of Isaiah and coloured with the prophetic symbolism of holy men that spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit—we need not wonder at its great popularity.

Blessed be God, the hope of the Church in this regard is a hope that maketh not ashamed; for the whole history of the Church points in the direction of this hymn; and as age after age passes on, each one paying in a larger contribution to the evidences of the faith, we can see more and more clearly how all this is to end. In the first century there were 500,000 Christians; in the second century, 2,000,000; in the third century, 5,000,000; in the fourth century, 10,000,000; in the fifth century, 15,000,000; in the sixth century, 20,000,000; in the seventh century, 24,000,000; in the eighth century, 30,000,000; in the ninth century, 40,000,000; in the tenth century, 50,000,000; in the eleventh century, 70,000,000; in the twelfth century, 80,000,000; in the thirteenth century, 75,000,000; in the fourteenth century, 80,000,000; in the fifteenth century, 100,000,000; in the sixteenth century, 125,000,000; in the seventeenth century, 135,000,000; in the eighteenth century, 200,000,000; in the nineteenth century there will be probably, before its close, 400,000,000!

Such is a rough record of the past, and at the same time a prophecy of the future, when the handful of corn sown on the top of the mountains shall shake like Lebanon, and God's great sacramental host shall fill the earth, numerous as the drops of dew in the womb of the morning.

We cannot dispose of this hymn without adding a word in regard to its special excellency. Some notably J. Bird, claim that it is the finest in the language, and certainly for wealth of imagery, for splendour of diction, for its exquisite polish, its smooth verse and delicious rhythm, and, above all, for the Christian sympathy beating in its every line, we do not see how it could be excelled. We are cautioned by some to bear in mind that it is only a paraphrase, that the materials were all furnished and prepared for his hand—that all that was wanted was a clever versifier to round them off into a glorious whole. True, but it is not given to every one to catch the spirit of inspiration, and to write as if sitting under the sound of David's lyre or the golden harp of the guiding angel that ministered to the Seer in Patmos. The spiritual insight, the far-reaching eye, the aroma that these forty-eight lines breathe, is the gift of the few, and speak to us of a soul that drank much of the crystal river that comes from the throne of God and the Lamb. Paraphrase or no paraphrase, this hymn is a wonderful work, and comes to ordinary mortals with something of the strange sweet surprise of a revelation. Any great work of art—a picture, a poem, a group of statuary,—appears to common people as nothing extraordinary. Many a one will walk through the Royal Academy, London, where the grandest works are on exhibition, and will see nothing calling for any great admiration. It takes genius to see genius and grace to see grace. No unctious like that of the Holy One. No magnet so powerful in the experience of the painter as a rare work of art, however unworthy the frame, for the moment his eye lights upon it he at once recognizes the hand of a master, and delights in the contemplation. So with every true heart in sympathy with the Master. Such was James Montgomery. The 72nd Psalm to him was a great revelation, for in him was great susceptibility, and to him was given not only the gift of spiritual insight, but the pen of description—a pen radiant with Pentecostal fire, and richly coloured with the symbolism and the aspirations of ancient seers who saw Christ's day afar off, and were glad. Because of this, God's special gift to James Montgomery, many will rise up and call him blessed, and his name shall be held in everlasting remembrance.