

Word,—“Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” The good Bishop will also be long remembered for his “morning and evening hymns” In how many instances, generation after generation, has the young heart been drawn heaven-ward by the sweet words of “The Evening Hymn,” and the slumbers of innocent childhood have fallen softer and more refreshing after repeating.

“Glory to thee my God, this night,
For all the blessings of the light;
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath thine own Almighty wings.

“Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear Son,
The ill that I this day have done;
That with the world, myself and thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

“Teach me to live, that I may dread
The grave as little as my bed;
Teach me to die, that so I may
Rise glorious at the judgment day.”

The early years of the eighteenth century were marked by the appearance of one of the greatest of English hymn-writers,—one whose name is familiar wherever the English tongue is spoken,—Dr. Isaac Watts. As a composer of “Divine Songs for Children” he is unrivalled. The best testimony to his excellence in this department is the fact that probably the larger part of the youthful population of England, Scotland, America, and the English colonies all over the world, are at this day learning “Watts’s Divine Songs for Children.” Who could wish for higher honour than this?—to strike the tender strings of young hearts, attune them to immortal praise and mould the character for heaven—to utter thoughts in words that will cling to the memory through life, and perhaps form part of the hallowed remembrances of the uppersanctuary. But while Watts is unapproached, as a writer of sacred songs for childhood, he takes a place in the front rank of those who have composed hymns for the sanctuary. His productions are marked by simplicity, purity of devotional sentiment, evangelical fervour, faithful adherence to scripture, and often by high poetic beauty. He is one of those holy, gifted singers whom the church must revere and love as a bountiful benefactor. About one-third of our little collection of paraphrases are from his pen.

Watts was born at Southampton in the year 1674. His mother, from whom he seems to have inherited his intellectual gifts, was descended from one of those noble Huguenot families, who were driven from France by persecution, in the early part of Queen Elizabeth’s reign; and doubtless, as a boy, he often listened, with eager heart, as his mother told of the wrongs and oppressions endured by his ancestors. His

father was a man of taste and intelligence, and educated his son Isaac for the dissenting ministry. At the age of eighteen, when living with his father at Southampton, he complained loudly of the dreary doggerel sung in the church to snivelling, drawing tunes, which he felt could not be a reasonable service or an acceptable offering. The selections were probably from some obscure hymn writers now utterly forgotten; or perhaps some of the halting couplets of Sternhold and Hopkins stirred his spirit to indignation, at hearing a noble Hebrew psalm so wretchedly rendered in the tongue of England. He was challenged to produce something better; and conscious of his powers he undertook to do so. Very soon after the service of the day was closed with the beautiful composition which begins his first book,—

“Behold the glories of the Lamb,
Amidst his Father’s throne;
Prepare new honours for his name,
And songs before unknown.”

So welcome was this “new song” to the worshippers, and such a pleasing contrast did they feel it to their accustomed doggerel that the “innovation” was almost unanimously hailed as a boon, and they entreated the author to continue his services until at length a sufficient number of hymns was contributed to form the basis of a book. Such was the commencement of a work which has aided millions in their devotions, given a mighty impulse to the cause of evangelical religion, and, in all probability, will be serviceable to the Church of Christ for centuries to come. This volume was at length published in 1707. Skeats says of the publication of these hymns, “no sooner did they appear than they were eagerly sought for and joyfully used. They were like showers of rain on the parched earth; and from nearly all the free churches of England and America a new harvest of praise to God at once arose.” In ten years six editions of his hymns were sold; and since then they have passed through numberless editions in Britain and America, while selections from them form a large proportion every modern hymn-book used in the Protestant churches. Watts was chosen minister of a Non-conformist church in London, but after labouring there eleven years, illness incapacitated him for the discharge of his duties. Sir Thomas Abney received him into his hospitable mansion, where he spent the remainder of his life, extending over thirty-six years, in the composition of literary and theological works; and also in the enlargement of his hymns. The universities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen united in conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. He departed in joyous, christian hope in 1748, and was in-