

## Additional Lessons.

LITTLE HYMN STUDIES—VI.

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[It is suggested that five minutes be given each Sunday to the simplifying and singing of the verse for the week, reviewing the preceding verse or verses as the weeks go by.]

## THERE'S A WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY.

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in his justice,  
Which is more than liberty."

THE author of this beautiful hymn, Frederick W. Faber, was an Englishman who was born in 1814, and died in 1863. He was a minister of the Church of England from 1837 to 1845; of the Roman Catholic Church from this time until his death. He was a poetic child and loved by his parents; but before he was fifteen his mother died, and before he was twenty his father also had passed away. From a child he was religious, and his lovely spirit and attractive face won for him many friends at school and at college. At Oxford he was under the influence of John Henry Newman, and worked with him for a revival of Church principles set forth in the famous "Tracts for the Times." It was the influence of Newman and a long stay on the Continent that drew him toward the Catholic Church. He died in London, at the age of forty-nine.

His hymns are full of the sweetness of a living, devout spirit, and he always shows us the Saviour as waiting with arms spread wide to take all souls into his heart of love. We find him thus in the hymn we have chosen for our lesson.

"There is welcome for the sinner,  
And more graces for the good;  
There is mercy with the Saviour;  
There is healing in his blood."

This hymn, as Faber wrote it, has thirteen stanzas, and is beautiful throughout; but the hymn, as it stands in the Methodist Hymnal, has four stanzas only. That you may sometime look for it in Faber's Hymns you will need to know the real beginning, as our first stanza is really the fourth. The whole hymn is a call to those who are afraid of God, or who do not truly know him, to come and find out that he is their most tender Friend. This is the first verse:

"Souls of men! why will ye scatter  
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts! why will ye wander  
From a love so true and deep?"

"Was there ever kindest shepherd  
Half so gentle, half so sweet  
As the Saviour, who would have us  
Come and gather round his feet?"

As a pastor Frederick Faber must have been a faithful and a loving undershepherd in the employ of his Master, the chief Shepherd. Indeed, we read in the story of his life that he began his preaching in a very wicked parish, but before he left it there was a great change, and that he "won over the most disorderly to his side." We must not forget, however, that he was trying to win them to his Master, and not to himself.

"For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of man's mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind."

Frederick Faber had seen all kinds of men—believers and unbelievers, Protestant and Roman Catholic—and he had seen how narrow were the words of even the most devout Christians, for they could not measure the love of God. He had seen, too, how the Lord looked upon them "as a father pitieth his children," and did not blame them for their narrowness, but came in to live in that narrow place and make it larger and more loving. He saw that God does this because his heart "is most wonderfully kind."

Then he longed to have men leave their little, narrow, unloving ways and follow the Master whose name is Love. He knew that if they came to understand the Divine Love they would certainly have love among themselves, and then there would be no more bitter words and acts, no more persecutions among Christians of different faiths. This has been the fault of the Church through all its history, and Faber was one of the men of love who lived to show forth the Lord Jesus Christ as he really is—Love in a divine-human form.

Perhaps innocent and loving little children, and the very old, who have grown innocent and loving by living the life of the Spirit, understand God best.

"If our love were but more simple,  
We should take him at his word;  
And our lives would be all sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord."

Here is the beautiful verse in which Faber tells a great secret. He says nothing about children, and yet he means that if we—his grown-up children—would only try to love Jesus in the simple, natural way that children love him we should have a perfect faith in him, as children have, and believe all that he tells us in his word. If we could only "become as little children" we should become better Christians, and instead of being full of doubts and fears and loneliness and sorrow, "our lives would be all sunshine," because he is the Light of the world.