

was near by, I was somewhat afraid. At the midnight hour, when all was still, I was feeling homesick and miserable. So to cheer my faltering spirits, I resolved to sing and pray, and I distinctly remember singing this hymn :

“ ‘ All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring,
Cover my defenceless head,
With the shadow of Thy wing.’ ”

Immediately a strange peace came upon me, and I felt no more fear the long night through.”

Then said the first speaker, “ Let me tell my part in the incident of that memorable night. I was a Union officer, in charge of a scouting party. We were in the wood near you at the time. I saw your form, but not your face. My men had covered you with their rifles, and were waiting for the word to fire. But when your rich, trustful voice sang out :

“ ‘ Cover my defenceless head,
With the shadow of Thy wing,’ ”

I said, ‘ Boys, lower your rifles. We will go back to camp.’ ”

The world’s artists win undying fame through years of plodding toil; but the world’s poets often secure immortality from the inspiration of an hour. This was specially true in the case of Reginald Heber, the poet-bishop of India. Among the many agencies that have tended to inspire and inaugurate the present “ Forward Movement for Missions,” the hymn, “ From Greenland’s icy mountains,” occupies a foremost place. For nearly three quarters of a century Heber’s immortal hymn has been stirring the great heart of the Church to bear the message of salvation to dying men the wide world over.

At the time of writing this hymn, Heber was rector of a Shropshire church, in England, and was invited by his father-in-law, Dr. Shipley, of Wrexham, to

deliver the first of a series of Sabbath evening missionary discourses, at Whitsuntide, in his parish church. On the Saturday afternoon previous to his engagement, Heber was enjoying a pleasant hour with congenial friends in Dr. Shipley’s rectory, when the Dean, suddenly remembering his son-in-law’s poetic genius, said, “ Reginald, write something for us to sing at the service to-morrow.”

Retiring to another part of the room, from a heart full of love for perishing souls and longing to bring them the light, he speedily wrote the first three verses of this now world-famous missionary lyric. Having read them, the dean and his friends were loud in their praise, and wished him to leave the hymn untouched. But in the mind of the author it lacked completion of thought, so he added the fourth thought, which has been the clarion call to missionary givings and goings, through all the passing years. That night the hymn was printed, and at the next morning service was first outbreathed in Christian song. Little did Heber realize in that morning hour that he was listening to the first strains of his own immortality.

Four years later he was appointed Bishop of India, and sailed for that far-off land, whence “ spicy breezes ” herald to the voyager approach to fragrant plains and fruitful groves. For three short years only was it permitted this great heart to proclaim the joyful tidings “ to men benighted,” when he was translated into the truer immortality of the skies. But his ardent missionary spirit, breathed in every line of his hymn, shall yet inspire the Christian Church to send forth the Gospel message,

“ Till earth’s remotest nation
Has learnt Messiah’s name.”