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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING: THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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Poetry.

SAUL OF TARSUS.

(By the late Rev. R. Treffry, Jun.)

No trumpet was blown, as the gate they pass'd,
Nor banner hung over their fierce array;
But they rode like the breath of the desert blast,
Fleeting and silently passing away:
Yet many look'd on that haughty man,
Whose eye was the star of the fiery van.

With frequent fests his cheek was pale,
And there sat a frown on his brow of pride;
And scorn on his quivering lip prevail'd,
As he thought on the name of the Crucified:
And his heart was as hard as the steel of his spear,
To the whispers of pity, or the murmure of fear.

On—on!—the towers of Damascus are nigh,
The accursed Nazarenes are given to our hand;
When, lo! an ineffable blaze from on high
Burnt, sudden as thought, on the hurrying band;
And the glowing flood of that flashing light
Dimm'd the cloudless sun in his noon-day height.

Vain is the speed of the startled horse,
And vain is the force of the glittering spear;
The scorner hath ended his ruthless course;
The Victor of Galilee triumpheth here,
And his words of mystic spirit appeal
The awe-stricken heart of the prostrate Saul.

There is night on his eye, and remorse on his brow,
As he sits in his chamber, helpless alone;
For the deeds woke up in his memory now,
Can riches, or blood, or sorrow atone?
Yet hope in fair promise the future arrays,
For the Crucified pleads, and the Pharisee prays.

THE DEVOTIONAL POETRY OF THE REV. CHARLES WESLEY.

(From Jackson's Life of Charles Wesley.)

It is as a writer of devotional poetry that Mr. Charles Wesley will be permanently remembered, and that his name will live in the annals of the Church. In the composition of hymns, adapted to Christian worship, he certainly has no equal in the English language, and is perhaps superior to every other uninspired man that ever lived. It does not appear that any person besides himself, in any section of the universal Church, has either written so many hymns, or hymns of such surpassing excellence. Those which he published would occupy about ten ordinary-sized duodecimo volumes; and the rest which he left in manuscript, and evidently designed for publication, would occupy at least ten more. It would be absurd to suppose that all these are of equal value; but, generally speaking, those of them which possess the least merit bear the impress of his genius.

It is doubtful whether any man has written the English language with greater purity and strength than Mr. Charles Wesley. He introduces words derived from the Greek, Latin, and French languages, when they are necessary, because of the metre, or the rhyme, and to give a greater variety to his diction; otherwise he almost always uses words of Saxon origin, the force and beauty of which are universally felt. An opinion has prevailed that several of his hymns were greatly improved by his brother, who gave them an elegance and polish which they did not originally possess. But this is true only to a very limited extent. Mr. John Wesley shortened many of his brother's hymns, when he inserted them in his general collection; in some instances he joined two or three short ones together; such allusions as were strictly personal and local he expunged, so as to adapt the stanzas in which they occurred to general use; but in other respects the alterations which he introduced into Charles's compositions were very few. The correctness of Mr. John Wesley's taste will not be disputed; and in logical clearness and arrangement he had few equals; but even in prose, while he excelled most men in simplicity and

strength, Charles rivalled him in terseness, and surpassed him in spirit. Both in prose and verse Charles's words and diction are thoroughly English. Nor did John's taste in poetry always come up to Charles's standard. In his copy of the *Arminian Magazine* he has inadvertently upon some pieces which John admired, and therefore inserted in that publication.

To Mr. Charles Wesley it was a great advantage that he was so well trained in classical learning. Had he not been a sound scholar, he could never have fully exercised his high vocation as a devotional poet, and the Church would not have derived the full benefit of his genius. Being familiar with the great poets of antiquity, he had a perfect knowledge of the laws of versification. While he possessed the true poetic spirit, he thoroughly understood "the art of poetry;" so that his compositions are not only free from the literary blemishes and defects which disfigure the works of many less-instructed writers, but in their numbers and structure invariably display the hand of a master. Of him, as well as of an elder poet, it might be justly said, that he no sooner began to write, whether "prose or verse," than it was apparent that "the style by certain vital signs it had was likely to live." This the intelligent vicar of Shoreham at once perceived and declared.

The ease and freedom with which he wrote are very apparent. His brother has remarked, that whenever he discovered a still sentence in any of his own prose writings, he expunged it instantly, deeming stiffness in an author an unpardonable offence against good taste. Charles manifestly cherished the same feeling with regard to verse. It cannot be said of him, as Dr. Johnson said of Prior, that the words which he selects to express his meaning are reluctantly "forced" into the situations which they occupy, and "do their duty sullenly." They rather appear formed for the exact service which is assigned them, and seldom can one of them be either dispensed with or transposed without impairing the beauty or the sense. Many of his stanzas are as elegantly free in their construction as even the finest paragraphs of Addison's prose. While his sentiments and language are admired by the most competent judges of good writing, his hymns are perfectly intelligible to the common people; thousands of whom, possessed of spiritual religion, feel their truth and power, and sing them with rapturous delight. His metres are very numerous, perhaps more so than those of any other English writer whatever; and it is difficult to say in which of them he most excelled. There are twenty-six metres in the Wesleyan collection in general use; and several others occur in the volumes which Charles published in his own name. This variety renders the reading of his books exceedingly agreeable. His cadences never pall on the ear, and never weary the attention. Like scenes in nature, and the best musical compositions, they are perpetually varying, and charm by their novelty.

As his object in writing was not the establishment of his own reputation, but the advancement of Christian piety, by fanning the flame of devotion, he was not so solicitous for the originality of his thoughts, as for their truth and importance. Occasionally, therefore, he did not hesitate to borrow a thought from other men, and cast it into his own mould; and while he proposed it in his own incomparable diction, he never failed to expand and improve it. He did not borrow the thoughts of other men, because he was himself destitute of the inventive faculty; for his hymns which are perfectly original are far more numerous, and embrace a wider range of subjects, than those of any other writer in the English language. His object in composition was first his own edification, and then the edification of the Church; and he was ready to

press into his service whatever was likely to advance those holy designs.

One of the most striking peculiarities of Mr. Charles Wesley's poetry is its originality. He always writes with vigor, for he had a wide range of language, and a great force of expression. He was not content with the common epithets, and the ordinary phrases, and he had too fine an ear to be ever to be rugged; and whenever he could rival the most tuneful of the poets in the liquid softness of his numbers, he would not be content with the ordinary excellence of the poet, but he would strive to be everywhere breathe.

In the range of their subjects they embrace the entire system of revealed truth, both doctrinal and practical, with the principal facts of Scripture history, and the whole of them to purposes of personal godliness. The perfection of the divine nature; the care and bounty of God's universal providence; the glory of Christ, as the everliving Son of the Father, the Almighty Creator and Preserver of all things; his incarnation, spotless example, his personal ministry, atoning sacrifice, ascension to heaven, intercession, and power, faithfulness, mercy, and grace; the everliving, the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, and his work in the entire process of human salvation; the connection of his operations with the mediation and glory of Christ; the Christian salvation, comprehending the preventing grace of God, giving repentance unto life, justification before God, the inward witness of adoption, the regeneration of the heart, progressive sanctification, the full renewal of the soul in the image of God, the perfect love of God and man; the Christian sacraments; the duties of Christianity, in all the relations of life; the happiness of the separate spirits of the just, the resurrection of the dead; the dissolution of the universe; the general judgment, the final perdition of ungodly men; the everlasting felicity of the righteous, in the enjoyment of God; these, with a thousand other topics connected with them, constitute the subjects of his incomparable poetry. All these he has illustrated with a diction of unrivalled purity, strength, and beauty, and formed into addresses to God, in adoration, confession, prayer, deprecation, thanksgiving, and praise. Every feeling of the heart, from the first communication of light to the understanding, producing conviction of sin, and desires after God and Christ, till salvation from sin is attained, the conflicts of the spiritual warfare are ended, and the sanctified believer enters into the heavenly paradise, is embodied in his hymns. The sorrows of penitence, the confidence of faith, the joys of pardon, holiness, and hope, the burning ardor of divine love, the pleasures of obedience, the warmth of universal benevolence, and the anticipations of future glory, he has not merely described, but expressed, and that in all their fulness and depth.

The poetry of this very eminent man is thoroughly evangelical. It is humiliating to see in the collections of hymns used by Arian and Socinian congregations, many which bear the names of orthodox divines. They relate mostly to the works and providence of God, and other subjects of a collateral kind, without any reference to the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the atonement for sin made by the death of Christ, justification through faith in his blood, and the influence of the Holy Ghost, as one of the benefits of Christ's mediation. Whereas these glorious peculiarities of the evangelical revelation constitute the very substance of Charles Wesley's verse. They cannot be expunged by a slight alteration in the phraseology. If these virtues are excluded, the hymns in general are destroyed; and hence his compositions, notwithstanding their high and poetical

merit, are seldom found in the devotional books of heterodox worshippers. From the day in which he bowed to his soul, by the blood of Christ, and entered upon his glorious career as a devotional poet, he might justly say,—

"Son of God, Saviour of men! Thy name is the captain's name of my song; Thy words, and never shall my lips thy praise forget, nor from thy Father's praise depart."

An opinion has been advanced, that his genius appears to the greatest advantage in his "Hymns for Families," where he has treated the ordinary affairs of life with simplicity and dignity, and expressed in poetic language the anxieties, joys, and sorrows, which arise out of the domestic situation. But if the writer of this narrative might be allowed to avow a preference, where all is excellent, he would specify the funeral hymns, including not only those which were published under that name, but all that were written on occasion of the death of pious individuals to whom the poet was personally known. These would be collected, form an ample volume; and their sentiments and diction are beyond all praise. They are throughout characterized by a tenderness of affection, a meek submission to the will of God, a warmth of Christian feelings, and a triumphant hope arising out of the truths of the Gospel, which place them decidedly at the head of all similar compositions in the English language. Notwithstanding the immensity of the occasions which called them forth, they present a surprising variety of thought and phrasing; and exhibit such a view of the power of Christianity to cheer and sustain in the prospect of dissolution, as involuntarily to extort the exclamation, "Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his."

The poetical talent that was committed to the trust of Mr. Charles Wesley involved a responsibility, the full extent of which it would be impossible to estimate. He was endowed with a power which scarcely any other man has been called to wield; a power of promoting the spiritual benefit, not only of the multitudes whom his voice could reach, but of millions whom he never saw. During the last fifty years few collections of hymns, designed for the use of evangelical congregations, whether belonging to the established Church, or to the Dissenting bodies, have been made without a considerable number of his compositions, which are admired in proportion as the people are spiritually-minded. His hymns are therefore extensively used in secret devotion, in family worship, and in public religious assemblies. Every Sabbath day myriads of voices are lifted up, and utter, in the hallowed strains which he has supplied, the language of penitence, of faith, of grateful love, and joyous hope, with which the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, has inspired them, and are thus in a course of training for the more perfect worship of heaven. Faithfully did he consecrate his talent to the Lord, and the honour which the Lord has conferred upon his servant is of the highest order, an honour widely extended, and increasing with every successive generation. As long as the language in which they are written is understood, and enlightened piety is cherished, the hymns of this venerable man will be used as a handmaid to devotion. They were not obtained by the invocation of dame Memory and her seven sisters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and send out his scripulum, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to purify the lips of whom he pleases." They are perfectly free from all earthly sentimentality, especially that which some modern poets affect, by a perpetual reference to consolated pleasures, sacred vestments, holy water, and the triumph of papal Rome; as if religion were a mere matter of the imagination, and Christians were still under the Jewish law. His hymns are as rational and manly in regu-