

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

## ARTICLE VII.

HYMNS, THEIR AUTHORSHIP AND HISTORY.<sup>1</sup>

BY HAMILTON A. HILL, ESQ., BOSTON, MASS.

CHRISTIAN Psalmody has a threefold history. There is the connected record of sacred song from the apostolic age to our own time ; there is the personal history of authors, with the circumstances in the midst of which they composed ; and there is also the history of particular hymns subsequently to their introduction by the church into its public services, or by individual Christians into their private devotions.

A comprehensive history of hymns, according to our first distinction, would be a history of the Christian church. The purity and fervor of the primitive faith ; the persecutions of the early centuries ; the outward prosperity which followed the baptism of Constantine ; the profound stillness of the Middle Ages ; the great awakenings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ; the revivals of the eighteenth ; and the missionary spirit of later times, — all, in turn, have moulded or modified the expressions with which men have sought to praise the Lord, and it would be difficult to divest these “hymns of the ages” of the social conditions and the experiences which gave rise to them. This is the scope of

<sup>1</sup> I. *The Voice of Christian Life in Song ; or, Hymns and Hymn Writers of many Lands and Ages.* From the London edition. New York : 1864.

II. *Historical Sketches of Hymns.* By J. Belcher. Philadelphia : 1839.

III. *Hymn Writers and their Hymns.* By the Rev. S. W. Christophers. London : 1866.

IV. *The Book of Praise, from the best English Hymn Writers, selected and arranged by Roundell Palmer.* From the London edition. Cambridge : 1864.

V. *Dies Irae, in thirteen original versions.* By Abraham Coles, M.D. With photographic illustrations. Third edition. New York : 1864.

VI. *The Seven Great Hymns of the Mediaeval Church.* Third edition. New York : 1866.

VII. *The Sabbath Hymn Book ; for the Service of Song in the House of the Lord.* New York : 1860.

Mrs. Charles's interesting volume, "The Voice of Christian Life in Song," a work which, although less generally known than "The Chronicles of the Schönberg Cotta Family" and "The Diary of Kitty Trevelyan," by the same gifted author, is fully entitled to a place with them in the library of every Christian household. Mr. Christopher's recent publication is a gracefully written and familiar commentary upon hymn-writers and their hymns, containing, as the preface says, "chat about hymns, their birth and parentage, their circumstances, their character, and their influence." Our own purpose in the present Article is similar to this; and while incidentally referring to history and to biography, we desire mainly to allude to the causes which produced and to the occasions which suggested a few of the hymns in use among us; also to notice the associations which in the lapse of time have accumulated about them and enriched them.

The authorship of many of our most familiar hymns is involved in uncertainty.

"Jerusalem, my happy home,"

which has been made the foundation for so many beautiful compositions, is one of these. The version in most common use among us (No. 1231 in the Sabbath Hymn Book),<sup>1</sup> first appeared in 1801, but the writer is not known. A variation of the original appeared in a collection made by David Dickson, and published at Edinburgh in 1662. The original itself is contained in a manuscript volume in the British Museum, the date of which is supposed to be about 1616, and is probably of Queen Elizabeth's time. It is there described as "a song by F. B. P., to the tune Diana." For two hundred years or more this sweet singer has rested in that happy harbor of the saints for which he so ardently longed; his sorrows have long since had an end, and with ineffable joy he has listened to the silver sound of the flood of life, as it flows "quite through the streets" of the heav-

<sup>1</sup> All the numbers in this Article will refer to Hymns in the Sabbath Hymn Book.

only Jerusalem. His aspiration, in the quaint language of the time, has, as we may believe, been abundantly fulfilled :

“ Ah, my sweet home, Hierusalem,  
 Would God I were in thee ;  
 Would God my woes were at an end,  
 Thy joys that I might see ! ”

All this we have reason to believe ; but who the man was whose initials we have before us, or what was his history, we shall never positively know, until we too shall have reached the beloved, the eternal city. Perhaps, as has been surmised, he was a prisoner in the Tower of London, for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is pleasant to conjecture concerning him ; but this is all that is permitted to us. Such a hymn is like a portrait which has come down to us from the past, without any record of the original. Some of the finest heads painted by Titian, as Mrs. Jameson tells us, remain to this hour unknown ; but a careful study of them may convey many vivid impressions respecting the persons they represent, what they were, and what they may have accomplished or suffered. So in an anonymous hymn the temperament or experience of the writer may be depicted so clearly that we shall seem to know all about him ; we may trace in its lines the saintly virtues, the heroic conflicts, the exultant hopes, of him whose heart first felt and whose lips first uttered it, and we shall find ourselves drawn out towards him as to a brother. And yet it is true, as a rule, that our pleasure in a hymn is enhanced by our acquaintance with its origin and history ; as, in a gallery, we delight most to behold the faces of those whose names and deeds are familiar to us.

A comparison of the life of an author with his hymns will throw a new light upon his character, while it will add to the interest of what he has written. Let us refer, as an example, to Isaac Watts, whom Sir Roundell Palmer calls the father of modern hymnody, and who, as he justly adds, is the author of a greater number of good hymns than any

other writer in the English language. When we sing his plaintive and dirge-like psalm (146),

“ Our God our help in ages past,”

or his tender, penitential, Christ-exalting hymn (316),

“ When I survey the wondrous cross,”

it is pleasant to know something of the personal history of him who has struck the key-note for the worship of the sanctuary for all time. We like to think of the pious youth, quietly pursuing his studies in his father's house at Southampton, and composing each week a hymn to be sung on the succeeding Sabbath by the congregation with which he worshipped. His first hymn thus used (337),

“ Behold the glories of the Lamb,”

still stands in his collection as the first hymn of the first book, and perhaps is hardly surpassed by any that follow it. Looking across to the Isle of Wight, he was led to meditate upon the “land of pure delight, where saints immortal reign.” The river between was, to his poet's eye, the Jordan of death, but his cheerful faith was gladdened by the expanding view on the other side, and he wrote (1191),

“ Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood  
Stand dressed in living green.”

We like to follow Watts to Stoke-Newington, where, in the midst of valuable public labors, he devoted himself to “the metrical imitation of David's Psalms into New Testament language,” and to the composition of songs and catechisms for children; and we readily agree with what Dr. Johnson says in his life of this excellent man, “he never wrote but for a good purpose”; and again, “every one acquainted with the common principles of human action will look with veneration on the writer who is at one time combating Locke, and at another making a catechism for children in their fourth year.”

It is interesting also to read what is told us of the habit of Charles Wesley in the composition of his hymns: “He

rode every day—clothed for winter, even in summer—a little horse gray with age. When he mounted, if a subject struck him, he proceeded to expand and put it in order. He would write a hymn thus given him on a card kept for the purpose, with his pencil, in short-hand. Not unfrequently he has come to the house in the City Road, and having left the pony in the garden, he would enter, crying out, ‘Pen and ink! Pen and ink!’ These being supplied, he wrote the hymn he had been composing. When this was done, he would look round on those present, and salute them with much kindness.”

Particular incidents also are interesting. Sir Roundell Palmer, in a note in the Book of Praise, tells us that Kirke White’s lines,

“Much in sorrow, oft in woe,”

were found after his death, written on the back of one of his mathematical papers. They were put into the form of a hymn by Dr. Collyer, and again by Miss Maitland, whose verses are considered the best (896):

“Oft in sorrow, oft in woe,”

is Miss Maitland’s version, somewhat altered and abbreviated. An anecdote of the same poet, given in his biography, furnishes another glimpse of his character, so devotional, so chastened, so tender. Rowing with his companions on a summer evening upon the river Trent, he sang his own sweet verses, “The Hiding-place,” making them doubly his by his melodious utterance of them; and as he sang on this occasion, he composed the lines which now stand at the close of the hymn:

“Then pure, immortal, sinless, freed,  
We, through the Lamb, shall be decreed;  
Shall meet the father face to face,  
And need no more a hiding-place.”

The more we examine the structure and significance of hymns, the more we shall be impressed with the deep personality of a very great number of them; and we shall find also that those have taken the strongest hold upon the heart

of the church which are the most decidedly personal, subjective, and experimental. Nor does an interest of this kind attach only to sacred poetry. It has been said of Byron, that he was "himself the beginning, the middle, and the end of all his poetry, the hero of every tale, the chief object in every landscape." And Southey remarks in his life of Cowper: "There are no passages in a poet's works which are more carped at while he lives, than those wherein he speaks of himself; and if he has any readers after his death, there are none then which are perused with greater interest." In hymns this reference to one's own conditions and feelings may be less obvious to the casual observer than in other poetry, but it will not the less be likely to manifest itself to those whose experiences or sympathies enable them to apprehend it.

John Newton's hymn,

"I asked the Lord that I might grow,  
In faith and love and every grace,"

doubtless details a reality in his religious history. No one familiar with the circumstances of the early life of the same composer, will be at a loss to account for his writing the hymn (568),

"In evil long I took delight,"

the second verse of which is,

"I saw one hanging on a tree,  
In agony and blood,  
Who fixed his languid eyes on me,  
As near the cross I stood."

Charles Wesley, we are told, never allowed a birthday to pass, without writing a cheerful hymn. His verses beginning (247),

"O for a thousand tongues to sing,"

were written on the anniversary of his conversion, his spiritual birthday. In his journal Wesley records the labors of a Sunday at Gwennaf in Cornwall, when, as he says, "nine or ten thousand by computation listened with all eagerness while I commended them to God and to the word of his grace. For near two hours I was enabled to preach repent-

ance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ. I broke out again and again in prayer and exhortation. I believed not one word would return empty. Seventy years' sufferings were overpaid by one such opportunity." After this memorable occasion this faithful servant of the Lord poured out the thanksgiving of his heart in a jubilant hymn :

" All thanks be to God,  
Who scatters abroad  
Throughout every place,  
By the least of his servants, his savor of grace ;  
Who, the victory gave,  
The praise let him have,  
For the work he hath done ;  
All honor and glory to Jesus alone."

Another favorite writer of hymns for the people, Joseph Hart, the author of (518)

" Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore,"

gives us a view of some of the inner experiences which lead to the composition of devotional and penitential hymns. "The week before Easter 1757, I had such an amazing view of the agony of Christ in the garden as I know not how well to describe. I was lost in wonder and adoration, and the impression was too deep, I believe, ever to be obliterated. I shall say no more of this, but only remark that, notwithstanding all that is talked about the sufferings of Jesus, none can know anything of them but by the Holy Ghost; and I believe that he that knows most knows but very little. It was then I made the first part of my hymn on the Passion :

Come all ye chosen saints of God,  
That long to feel the cleansing blood,  
In pensive pleasures join with me,  
To sing of sad Gethsemane."

In such instances as these we see that certain circumstances in the history of the author were indispensable to the production of the songs which he uttered. An outburst of joy, a wail of anguish, an offering of thanksgiving, a tribute of worship, — whatever the nature of the hymn, it had its

origin in some profound feeling of the soul which could not be repressed. "I believed, therefore have I spoken." It might be added, "I worshipped, therefore have I sung." Some Christians have composed but a single hymn, their hearts, like a rare flower, blossoming but once upon the earth; others have left their songs, like scattered fragrance, all along the path of their pilgrimage.

It need hardly be said that, from the very nature of the case, many of the hymns of the class to which we are now alluding could not have been prepared with a view to publicity, or for public use. When Mrs. Brown, a truly pious woman, who died in Illinois a few years ago, wrote with an infant lying upon her lap:

"I love to steal a while away  
From children and from care,"

she did not imagine that her verses, with a very slight alteration to adapt them to general use (64), would become a favorite expression of Christian hearts at the devotions of the evening hour. When James Hervey, the scholarly author of "Meditations and Reflections," with his heart disappointed in its tenderest hopes, indited the hymn (242) commencing:

"Since all the varying scenes of time,"

he wrote with a view to his own consolation. But who shall say how many have been strengthened in the time of bereavement and adversity by his trustful words:

"Good when he gives, supremely good,  
Nor less when he denies;  
Ev'n crosses from his sovereign hand  
Are blessings in disguise."

This leads us to notice also that our most useful and precious hymns have generally been produced in the midst of trials and difficulties. We should have anticipated, perhaps, that the cloisters of the Middle Ages, and other quiet retreats of pious souls, and the peaceful flow of a calm Christian experience would yield the richest utterances in holy song; but it is not so. "The battle songs of the church," says Mrs. Charles, "are written on the battle-field." For we must not

forget that the healthy condition of the church on earth is not one of rest. The eternal Sabbath-keeping is yet before us in the future. Under the present dispensation the church truly lives and is in health only as it is engaged in conflict with the various forms of evil by which it is surrounded, and the heart of the believer is never so attuned to sweetest harmony as when deeply in earnest in its struggles with indwelling sin or outward corruptions, or as when weighed down under the mysterious and afflictive allotments of divine Providence. Shelley says in one of his best lines :

“ They learn by suffering what they teach in song.”

“ The dear cross hath pressed many songs out of me,” said Rist. Of Paul Gerhard it is remarked, “ one of his most beautiful hymns,

“ Wake up my heart and sing,”

was composed on the steps of the altar at Lübben, after a night of anguish. Every line of it breathes the deepest trust and peace.” How many of Mrs. Steele’s excellent hymns remind us of the sick chamber to which she was confined for so long a period. She was one of those who are “ chosen in the furnace of affliction ; and her earnest yearnings for rest and for home took form in such verses as (1236),

“ Far from these narrow scenes of night,”

and

“ Thou lovely source of true delight.”

So deeply experimental has that affecting hymn (966),

“ Jesus, I my cross have taken,”

been seen to be, that in the uncertainty which for some time existed in reference to its authorship, it was quite generally supposed to have been composed for the use and support of the devoted missionary, Henry Martyn, and was attributed to Miss Grenfell, the lady to whom he was engaged to be married. It is now known to have been written by the Rev. Henry Francis Lyte, vicar of Brixham, in South Devon, the author of two delightful volumes, “ Tales in Verse,” and “ Poems, chiefly religious.” We should be quite sure before-

hand that he who could write the hymn of self-renunciation and of consecration to the Saviour just referred to, must have been called to many and bitter trials and disappointments; and on referring to the memoirs of Mr. Lyte we find that he was, although of good family, somewhat straitened in his circumstances in early life, that he had to struggle hard to obtain a liberal education, that, to use his own language, he was jostled from one curacy to another, and that when at length he was settled in the parish of Brixham, where indeed he was much beloved, he had a great deal to try him in his pastorate, and much to contend with in his own feeble and gradually failing health. Such poems as that now before us, and another, kindred to it, entitled "Submission," beginning:

"Yet think not, O my soul, to keep  
Thy progress on to God,  
By any road less rough and steep  
Than that thy fathers trod,"

were not composed merely for the pleasure of composition, but they were the breathings of a spirit that must have utterance; the songs of such devoted saints of God are as natural and as necessary as their prayers upon their knees. Under such pressure the psalmist wrote, when he said: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God!" Or when he said: "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child. Let Israel hope in the Lord henceforth and forever."

Times of public calamity also suggest the strains with which holy men seek to guide the metrical prayers and praises of the Christian church. Luther's first hymn is said to have been called forth by the death of two martyrs of Christ, Augustine monks, burnt at Brussels, the earliest victims in the Flemish provinces for the reformed faith. The period of the thirty years' war greatly enriched German hymnology. Several of Charles Wesley's judgment hymns

were written at the close of the year 1755, just when the public mind in England was agitated by the news of the Lisbon earthquake. In this earthquake, and in the fire which swept the city directly afterwards, between thirty and forty thousand persons were supposed to have perished. It would be interesting to quote the details of that awful event, keeping in mind the suddenness of the shock, and the brevity of its duration,—only two or three minutes,—and then to turn to some of the startling verses in which the poet describes the final catastrophe, as, for example :

“ Every island, sea, and mountain,  
 Heaven and earth, shall flee away ;  
 All who hate him must, confounded,  
 Hear the trump proclaim the day :  
 Come to judgment,  
 Come to judgment, come away !”

or again,

“ Stand th' omnipotent decree ;  
 Jehovah's will be done !  
 Nature's end we wait to see,  
 And hear her final groan ;  
 Let this earth dissolve, and blend  
 In death the wicked and the just ;  
 Let those pond'rous orbs descend,  
 And grind us into dust.”

Bernard and Tersteegen may perhaps be mentioned as exceptions to the rule which we have sought to illustrate, that a life of conflict and strife is the most favorable for the production of hymns which the church will delight to remember and to use ; but we think on the contrary the history of their lives most pointedly confirms it. The former was indeed a monk, but his was no inactive career. He founded, and for nearly forty years, presided over, the Abbey at Clairvaux ; he was occupied with many labors, both civil and ecclesiastical ; and more than all, by the preaching of the second crusade, he aroused Europe from its lethargy,—intellectual, social, spiritual. He was the great reformer, we had almost said the revivalist, of the twelfth century. And Tersteegen, although he partly preferred retirement, and

adopted the quiet employment of a ribbon-maker, in order that he might pass his time in uninterrupted meditation, was not permitted to indulge himself in this respect. Two quotations will indicate the manner of life of him who wrote the favorite verses, beginning :

“Thou hidden love of God, whose height,  
Whose depth unfathomed, no man knows.”

He writes at one time : “There is still, God be thanked, a great awakening and stir among the people here ; for some weeks together, from morning to night, they were compelled to wait one for another, to have an opportunity of speaking with me. Many were obliged to return five or six times before a quarter of an hour could be found to converse with me alone ; and I have occasionally had ten, twenty, and even thirty, anxious souls with me at the same time.” And again, several years later : “Last Sunday I had scarcely risen from my bed, when I was obliged to address more than sixty persons who had thronged into the house. After I had done speaking I had to converse with various individuals until evening. And yesterday morning, after I had passed the whole night in a fever; at least two hundred and fifty people assembled in the corn-loft and in the room adjoining, to whom I spoke, with the Lord’s gracious assistance. I spoke to-day on the last words of the Lord Jesus, ‘It is finished,’ and comforted myself with the hope that my toils and troubles would also soon be finished.”

Well did Adam of St. Victor sing in his hymn on the martyrdom of St. Lawrence :

“As the harp-strings only render  
All their treasures of sweet sound,  
All their music, glad or tender,  
Firmly struck and tightly bound ;  
“So the hearts of Christians owe  
Each its deepest, sweetest strain,  
To the pressure firm of woe,  
And the tension tight of pain.  
“Spices crushed their pungence yield,  
Trodden scents their sweets respire ;

Would you have its strength revealed,  
Cast the incense in the fire.

“ Thus the crushed and broken frame  
Oft doth sweetest graces yield ;  
And through suffering, toil, and shame,  
From the martyr’s keenest flame,  
Heavenly incense is distilled.”

A more particular reference to some hymns, interesting from their antiquity, their history, or their authorship, will serve further to illustrate what has already been said. Although not invariably following the order of time, it will be natural to speak first of the oldest hymn in our collections (1084) :

“ Shepherd of tender youth,  
Guiding in love and truth  
Through devious ways, —  
Christ, our triumphant King,  
We come thy name to sing,  
And here our children bring  
To shout thy praise.”

It is found in Greek in the works of Clement of Alexandria, who flourished at the close of the second century. We find it difficult to realize the age of this ancient hymn. It dates from a period long before the unknown author sang his song of Jerusalem ; long before the Dies Irae was composed ; long before the Te Deum became a part of the service of the church. It takes us back to primitive days, and almost to the immediate successors of the apostles. The following verse, a literal translation, from the “Voice of Christian Life in Song,” will convey an idea of its peculiar style and structure :

These babes  
With tender lips  
Nourished ;  
By the dew of the Spirit  
Replenished ;  
Their artless praises,  
Their true hymns,  
O Christ, our king, —

Sacred rewards  
Of the doctrine of life, —  
We hymn together ;  
We hymn in simplicity,  
The mighty child.  
The chorus of peace,  
The kindred of Christ,  
The race of the temperate,  
We will praise together the God of peace.”

It is interesting to notice that the first outpouring of Christian souls in sacred song was in language which children may use in their worship of the Saviour. The Alexandrian Clement wrote with a heart full of sympathy for the lambs of the flock. Ephraim the Syrian, the next hymn-writer of whom we know, and who lived a century later, manifested the same interest in the young. And in this nineteenth century, the last hymn written by the sainted Montgomery before his promotion to the heavenly choirs, was for a Sunday-school celebration. Thus we see that although Sunday schools, as they now exist, are a modern agency in the church, the spirit which devised them and which sustains them is the same as that of the earliest days ; then, as now, Christians manifested their attachment to the Redeemer by their care for those whom, when upon the earth, he ever regarded with most tender love.

Another ancient hymn deserving our notice, is (1203),

“ The pangs of death are near,  
Amid the joys of life ;  
And when in guilty fear  
We end our dying strife,  
To whom, most holy Lord,  
Shall we for succor flee ?  
O thou most mighty God,  
Our help is laid on thee !  
Lord Jesus, by thy bloody stains,  
Save, save us from hell's bitter pains.”

Seven hundred years after the death of Clement, Notker, a Benedictine monk of St Gall, saw some workmen engaged in building the bridge of Martinsbruck at the peril of their

lives. The terrors of the spot and the exposure of the men suggested to the beholder, who is said to have lisped in his speech, but who certainly did not falter in his verses, this hymn, which is called "Media in vita." It was soon set to music, and was universally adopted, first as a battle song, and subsequently as a dirge. Luther's version is spirited and evangelical; in reading it as translated by Miss Winkworth, in the *Lyra Germanica*, we can almost see the fearful Alpine gorge, the frail overhanging scaffold, and the men with only a rope and a plank between them and eternity; and we experience a like shudder to that which came over the holy man more than nine hundred years ago:

" In the midst of life, behold  
 Death has girt us round :  
 Whom for help then shall we pray,  
 Where shall grace be found ?

. . . . .  
 " In the midst of death, the jaws  
 Of hell against us gape :  
 Who from peril dire as this  
 Openeth us escape ?"

His hymn, not in metrical form, is read in the burial-service of the Episcopal church, and will doubtless thus continue in use until the second coming of our Lord to fulfil the promise given ages ago: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." The celebrated Robert Hall once looked in the Bible to find the familiar words "In the midst of life we are in death," as the text for a sermon. "So venerable," remarks an eminent scholar, "does a Christian hymn become which has lived a thousand years."<sup>1</sup>

In this connection it will be appropriate to refer to Charles Wesley's sublime hymn,

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Christophers mentions this incident in connection with a versicle of the Te Deum. "All the earth doth worship thee, the Father Everlasting."

“Thou God of glorious majesty,  
 To thee, against myself, to thee,  
 A worm of earth, I cry ;  
 An half-awakened child of man,  
 An heir of endless bliss or pain,  
 A sinner born to die.”

In most of our books this first verse is omitted, and the hymn commences: “Lo, on a narrow neck of land” (495). It was written on the Land’s End in Cornwall, which is literally a “narrow neck,” stretching out into the Atlantic. Dr. Adam Clarke describes the locality in a letter written Oct. 11, 1819: “I write this on the last projecting point of rock of the Land’s End, upwards of two hundred feet perpendicular above the sea, which is raging and roaring tremendously, threatening destruction to myself and the narrow point of rock on which I am sitting. On my right hand is the Bristol Channel, and before me the vast Atlantic Ocean. This is the place where Charles Wesley composed those fine lines,

‘Lo, on a narrow neck of land  
 Twixt two unbounded seas I stand,  
 Secure, insensible !  
 A point of time, a moment’s space,  
 Removes me to that heavenly place, —  
 Or shuts me up in hell.’ ”

With the danger of our situation thus strikingly and solemnly set forth, who of us can hesitate to join fervently in the prayer,

“O God, mine inmost soul convert,  
 And deeply on my thoughtful heart  
 Eternal things impress ;  
 Give me to feel their solemn weight,  
 And tremble on the brink of fate,  
 And wake to righteousness.”

The psalmist very probably had some such dangerous steep in mind when he wrote: “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places ; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment ! They are utterly consumed with terrors.”

We cannot pass unmentioned the "Dies Irae," the great mediaeval hymn, which has descended to us enriched with the associations of six centuries. Its reputed author is Thomas von Celano, a Franciscan monk. The first line, so startling and solemn, was suggested by the words of the prophet Zephaniah :<sup>1</sup> "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."

It is justly observed by Dr. Coles, that "of the Latin hymns this is the best known, and the acknowledged masterpiece. There are others which possess much sweetness and beauty, but this stands unrivalled. It has superior beauties with none of their defects. For the most part they are more or less Romish ; but this is Catholic, and not Romish at all. It is universal as humanity. It is the cry of the human soul. It bears indubitable marks of being a personal experience."

The translations of this hymn into German and English are almost numberless. It has also been translated into other languages, and recently into modern Greek, by an English missionary in the East. Excellent however as many of these translations are, it is declared by those capable of judging, that not one of them does justice to the original. In the Latin the rhyme is double, and the cadence particularly solemn and affecting. Boswell tells us that Dr. Johnson, who was fond of repeating this hymn, frequently burst into tears when he came to the following stanza :

" Quaerens me sedisti lassus,  
Redemisti crucem passus,  
Tantus labor non sit cassus !

Archbishop Trench, who has given us the closest of the English versions, translates these lines thus :

" Tired thou satest, seeking me,  
Crucified to set me free ;  
Let such pain not fruitless be !"

<sup>1</sup> Zeph. i. 15, which in the Vulgate reads, "Dies irae, dies illa, dies tribulationis et angustiae," etc.

Sir Walter Scott has given us a paraphrase of the opening verse, in some lines of great power and solemnity, in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which are frequently used in our churches (1283). They are introduced thus:

“ The mass was sung, and prayers were said,  
 And solemn requiem for the dead ;  
 And bells tolled out their mighty peal,  
 For the departed spirit’s weal ;  
 And ever in the office close  
 The hymn of intercession rose ;  
 And far the echoing aisles prolong  
 The awful burden of the song.  
Dies irae, Dies illa !  
 Solvet soeculum in favilla.

“ While the pealing organ rung, —  
 Were it meet with sacred strain  
 To close my lay so light and vain, —  
 Thus the holy fathers sung :

“ That day of wrath ! that dreadful day  
 When heaven and earth shall pass away !  
 What power shall be the sinner’s stay ?  
 How shall he meet that dreadful day ?

“ When shrivelling like a parched scroll,  
 The flaming heavens together roll ;  
 And louder yet, and still more dread,  
 Swells the high trump that wakes the dead !

“ Oh, on that day, that wrathful day,  
 When man to judgment wakes from clay,  
 Be thou the trembling sinners stay,  
 When heaven and earth shall pass away !

Sir Walter, in his last days of life and reason, was frequently overheard quoting this hymn, with portions of the old Scotch Psalms and of the Scriptures. An earlier poet, the Earl of Roscommon, a serious-minded and accomplished man, uttered in the moment he expired (1684) with great energy, two lines of his own translation of the “ *Dies Irae*,” excelling all others, it has been said, in the fervor of its devotion, to be found in some of our books (1282),

“ My God, my father, and my friend,  
 Do not forsake me in the end !”

Upon this impressive hymn, Mozart founded his celebrated Requiem, the last he ever composed.

Among the many noble hymns, for which we are indebted to the great Protestant Reformation on the continent of Europe, that known as the battle-song of Gustavus Adolphus, has perhaps the most interesting history (899) :

“ Fear not, O little flock, the foe  
Who madly seeks your overthrow ;  
Dread not his rage and power :  
What though your courage sometimes faints,  
This seeming triumph o'er God's saints  
Lasts but a little hour.”

In the *Lyra Germanica* this is attributed to Altenberg, but its authorship is by some ascribed to the great Gustavus himself, who is said to have given it in substance to his chaplain, by whom it was moulded into verse. Every line is characteristic of the great warrior, whose piety was almost as remarkable as his military prowess. The grandson of Gustavus Vasa — the first Protestant prince who had worn the regal diadem, — he devoted himself, from the day he ascended the throne, to the cause of civil and religious liberty. Not only as a soldier and a statesman, but as a Christian, his ideas were far in advance of the age in which he lived ; for in 1627 he proposed opening trade with the West Indies, partly for purposes of commercial enterprise, and partly for spreading the sacred truths of the gospel over those then uncultivated and unenlightened regions.

When meditating the invasion of the empire, he said : “ If it is the will of the Supreme Being that Gustavus must die in the defence of his country, he pays the tribute with thankful acquiescence ; it is a king's duty and religion to obey the great sovereign of kings without a murmur.” This spirit of submission to and reliance upon the Most High he manifested throughout those memorable campaigns. His first thought upon landing in Germany, was to commit himself and his army in prayer to God. At Leipzig he gave the battle-cry “ God with us ” ; the noblest ever adopted by a Christian hero.

This hymn, now before us, was his favorite battle-song ; and the account which the historian gives of the last occasion upon which he used it belongs to the annals of sacred song.

On the morning of his last battle, November 6, 1632, when the armies of Gustavus and Wallenstein were drawn up, waiting until the morning mist dispersed, to commence the attack, the king commanded Luther's grand psalm, "God is a stronghold firm and sure," to be sung, and then, "Fear not, O little flock, the foe," accompanied by the drums and trumpets of the whole army. Immediately afterwards the mist broke, and the sunshine burst on the two armies. For a moment Gustavus Adolphus knelt beside his horse in face of his soldiers, and repeated his usual battle-prayer, "O Lord Jesus Christ, bless our arms and this day's battle, for the glory of thy holy name." Then passing along the lines, with a few brief words of encouragement, he gave the cry, "God with us"; the same with which he had conquered on the field of Leipsic. Thus began the day which laid him low amidst the thickest of the fight. After being wounded by the imperial cuirassiers, they asked him who he was ; he replied boldly, "I am the king of Sweden, and seal with my blood the Protestant religion, and the liberties of Germany ;" adding, likewise, "alas my poor queen!" His last words were, "My God, my God!" His body bore the marks of eight wounds, three received previously, the rest upon this fatal day.

This song, thus baptized in blood on the plains of Lutzen, has imparted strength to many a soldier of the cross during the two centuries that have succeeded. In our own land, within the last few years, its words have been altogether appropriate for the inspiration of our armies, and for the consolation of our citizens. We remember that on the evening of the Monday, in the summer of 1861, upon which the intelligence of the first battle of Bull Run was received, we were with friends in the country, where the latest news from town could not be obtained, and all were much depressed by the greatly exaggerated accounts of that reverse which at first prevailed. It was then that this old battle-song was

referred to, and if it had been written expressly for the emergency, its recital could not have proved more appropriate or consolatory. It was like a voice from heaven :

“ This seeming triumph o'er God's saints,  
Lasts but a little hour.”

Let the national motto be, “ God with us ” ; let our dependence be upon the Lord of hosts in these later stages, through which we are now passing, of the great conflict for nationality and for freedom, and “ our complete and glorious victory cannot fail.”

“ Amen. Lord Jesus, grant our prayer ;  
Great Captain, now thine arm make bare ;  
Thy church with strength defend !  
So shall all saints and martyrs raise  
A joyful chorus to thy praise,  
Through ages without end ! ”

At the opening of the eighteenth century Joseph Addison, then a young man, left his native land to enrich his mind by foreign travel. This journey gave rise to a composition sometimes published as an imitation of a part of the one hundred and seventh psalm (202) :

“ How are thy servants blest, O Lord,  
How sure is their defence ! ”

His biographer informs us that in the month of December 1700, he embarked at Marseilles. Even at that season, the coast along which he sailed was rich with verdure, but he soon encountered one of the sudden and severe storms so common on the Mediterranean Sea. The captain gave up all for lost, and confessed himself to a monk who happened to be on board. Addison spent the solemn moments more profitably. The storm abated, and he reached Genoa in safety ; but the impression made upon his mind by this peril, and by his providential deliverance was abiding, and is believed to have suggested some of the stanzas of the hymn referred to :

“ When by the dreadful tempest borne,  
High on the broken wave,

They know thou art not slow to hear,  
Nor impotent to save.

“ The storm is laid, the winds retire,  
Obedient to thy will ;  
The sea that roars at thy command,  
At thy command is still.”

Passing through the Papal States, Addison went to Naples, and after a time came back to Rome, and there spent the hot and sickly months of August and September, when for the inhabitants even, much more for strangers, it is extremely hazardous to remain. His gratitude for his safety under this exposure is recorded in the verse :

“ In foreign realms and lands remote,  
Supported by thy care,  
Through burning climes they pass unhurt,  
And breathe in tainted air.”

Montgomery calls this “ the traveller’s hymn.” Dr. Kirk has told us that when travelling in Syria in 1857, in the sickly season, he and his companion frequently sang this beautiful psalm of confidence and praise ; and many another traveller by land and by sea has found in these pious verses a condensed and appropriate expression of his own feelings, not to be surpassed by anything he could himself have framed.

Addison’s sacred poems which appeared in the Saturday numbers of the Spectator with his religious meditations, are well known to us all, and several of them have a permanent place in our collections of hymns. Montgomery says of them : “ It is only to be regretted that they are not more in number, and that the God of grace as well as the God of providence is not more distinctly recognized in them.”

Macaulay has beautifully epitomized the life of this pure-minded man and elegant scholar, in the language of some of his own hymns ; and as an illustration of what has already been said upon the individuality of hymns, we cannot forbear to quote the passage : “ The piety of Addison was, in truth, of a singularly cheerful character. The feeling which pre-

dominates in all his devotional writings is gratitude. God was to him the all-wise and all-powerful friend who had watched over his cradle with more than maternal tenderness; who had listened to his cries before they could form themselves in prayer; who had preserved his youth from the snares of vice; who had made his cup run over with worldly blessings; who had doubled the value of those blessings by bestowing a thankful heart to enjoy them, and dear friends to partake them; who had rebuked the waves of the Ligurian Gulf, had purified the autumnal air of the Campagna, and had restrained the avalanches of Mount Cenis. Of the Psalms, his favorite was that which represents the ruler of all things under the endearing image of a shepherd, whose crook guides the flock safe through gloomy and desolate glens to meadows well watered and rich with herbage. On that goodness to which he ascribed all the happiness of his life he relied in the hour of death with the love which casteth out fear. He died on the 17th of June, 1719, having just entered on his forty-eighth year."

His message to his step-son, the gay young Earl of Warwick, is well known. "Come," said he, "and see how a Christian can die." It suggested the lines in the touching eulogy of Tickell:

" He taught us how to live, and, oh, too high  
The price of knowledge, taught us how to die."

At the time when Addison was furnishing his hymns to the public, Dr. Watts contributed a paper to the Spectator, with a version of one of the psalms. It is No. 461, and bears date August 19th, 1712. We quote as follows: "Upon reading the hymns that you have published in some late papers, I had a mind to try yesterday whether I could write one. The one hundred and fourteenth psalm appears to me an admirable ode, and I began to turn it into our language. As I was describing the journey of Israel from Egypt, and added the divine presence among them, I perceived a beauty in this psalm which was entirely new to me, and which I was going to lose; and that is, that the poet

utterly conceals the presence of God in the beginning of it, and rather lets a possessive pronoun go without a substantive, than he will so much as mention anything of divinity there. 'Judah was his sanctuary and Israel his dominion,' or kingdom. The reason now seems evident, and this conduct necessary; for if God had appeared before, there could be no wonder why the mountains should leap and the sea retire; therefore, that this convulsion of nature may be brought in with due surprise, his name is not mentioned till afterward, and then with a very agreeable turn of thought God is introduced at once in all his majesty. This is what I have attempted to imitate in a translation without paraphrase, and to preserve what I could of the spirit of the sacred author:"

"When Israel, freed from Pharaoh's hand,  
Left the proud tyrant and his land,  
The tribes with cheerful homage own  
Their king, and Judah was his throne.

"Across the deep their journey lay;  
The deep divides to make them way;  
The streams of Jordan saw, and fled  
With backward current to their head.

"The mountains shook like frightened sheep,  
Like lambs the little hillocks leap;  
Not Sinai on her base could stand,  
Conscious of sov'reign power at hand.

"What power could make the deep divide?  
Make Jordan backward roll his tide?  
Why did ye leap, ye little hills?  
And whence the fright that Sinai feels?

Let every mountain, every flood  
Retire, and know th' approaching God,  
The king of Israel. See him here!  
Tremble thou earth, adore and fear.

"He thunders, and all nature mourns;  
The rock to standing pools he turns;  
Flints spring with fountains at his word,  
And fires and seas confess their Lord."

There are hymns which, in consequence of the benefits conferred by them upon some servant of the Lord whose name and experience are precious to the church, have in a sense become hallowed, like sanctuaries in which souls have been born again and fitted for the skies; Christian tears have watered them; Christian faith has triumphed in them; by their means lowly and contrite spirits have been raised to communion with their God. Superadded to the interest of their authorship and to their intrinsic value is this almost heavenly radiance with which religious biography has invested them. Every reader will recall some such. As an example we may mention (116, 344),

"The God of Abrah'm praise,"

written by Thomas Olivers, one of Wesley's co-laborers, a singularly gifted, although not an educated man. Montgomery says of it: "This noble ode, though the essay of an unlettered man, claims special honor. There is not in our language a lyric of more majestic style, more elevated thought, or more glorious imagery.

Mr. Christophers draws an interesting comparison between Byron's plaintive and melodious imitation of the one hundred and thirty-seventh psalm,

"We sat down and wept by the waters  
Of Babel, and thought of the day,"

with the magnificent verses which Scott has put on the lips of his heroine Rebecca (1113),

"When Israel of the Lord beloved,  
Out from the land of bondage came,"

and with the hymn by Olivers now before us, and he says: "The hymns of this remarkable trio are like a 'psalm of degrees.' They move in an upward gradation, raising the swell of Christian song until it rivals the music of Hebrew fathers. Under Byron's hand the distinctive form of beauty begins to breathe and unfold its tender charms. At Scott's touch it expands into more majestic proportions, and puts forth more of its inner life. But at Olivers's command it

manifests its maturity of soul, and gives full and harmonious expression to all its heavenliness of thought and affection. In the course of conversation a few years ago, the son of an old minister said: 'I remember my father telling me that he was once standing in the aisle of City Road Chapel, during a conference in Wesley's time, and Thomas Olivers, one of the preachers, came down to me, and said, Look at this; I have rendered it from the Hebrew, giving it as far as I could a Christian character, and I have called on Leoni the Jew, who has given me a synagogue melody to suit it; here is the tune, and it is to be called Leoni.' "

But we refer to this hymn particularly in this connection, because of its association with the cherished name of Henry Martyn. While that devoted follower of the Saviour was at Falmouth, awaiting the final departure of the fleet with which he was to leave England forever, he wrote in his journal, under date of July 29, 1805, as follows: "I was much engaged at intervals in learning the hymn,

'The God of Abrah'm praise';

"As often as I could use the language of it with any truth, my heart was a little at ease.

'The God of Abrah'm praise,  
At whose supreme command,  
From earth I rise, and seek the joys  
At his right hand.  
I all on earth forsake, —  
Its wisdom, fame, and power, —  
And him my only portion make,  
My shield and tower.'

"There was something peculiarly solemn and affecting to me in this hymn, and particularly at this time. The truth of the sentiments I knew well enough. But alas, I felt that the state of mind expressed in it was above mine at the time; and I felt loth to forsake all on earth."

We think we may safely affirm that these admirable lines were never more appropriately adopted than by this holy man. Martyn was forsaking all on earth, brilliant academic

fame and position, usefulness and eminence in the English church, a cultivated home in the land to which his ardent soul so tenaciously clung, tender and appreciative friends, and one dearer than all besides. It was no ordinary sacrifice to which he was called. To any man it would have been most severe; to him it was crushing.

It is profitable for us, who think we sometimes deny ourselves and take up the cross, although as compared with the experience of Martyn, such self-denial is hardly worthy of the name, to recall a hymn whose pious sentiments and exalted strain imparted to him under such circumstances peace and consolation. "Solemn and affecting" to us is this hymn, because he thus made it his own.

Doubtless it was much in his mind during the voyage; for in his journal under date of September 28th, off Madeira, he writes: "O for the steady abiding under the shadow of the Almighty; and as the days pass on and bring me nearer to the end of the things which are seen, so let me be more and more quickened, to be ready for the unseen world.

‘By faith I see the land  
With peace and plenty blest,—  
land of sacred liberty,  
And endless rest.’”

We do not remember any other allusion to this hymn in his writings; but we doubt not that in far-off India and in Persia he repeated it with refreshment to his spirit; and it may be that when, in the solitudes of Asiatic Turkey, among strangers, and almost equally removed from beloved ones east and west, he felt the approach of death, he quoted with triumphant confidence:

“He by himself hath sworn;  
I on his oath depend;  
I shall, on eagle’s wings upborne,  
To heaven ascend.  
I shall behold his face;  
I shall his power adore;  
And sing the wonders of his grace  
Forevermore.”

The illustration of our subject would not be complete without a special reference to Cowper — to the circumstances of his life, and to some of the hymns which in the providence of God these produced. Cowper at the age of thirty-two was overtaken by a morbid melancholy, which soon assumed the most alarming form, and at length developed into insanity. Although he had been correct in his outward life, and blameless in his intercourse with his fellow-men, he had not then experienced the renewing power of the Spirit of God; and his insanity, under the influence of strong religious convictions, took the form of blank and utter despair about the salvation of his soul. Having made repeated attempts at self-destruction, he was removed to St. Albans, to the house of Dr. Cotton, a pious and skilful physician. Five months he passed in continual expectation that the divine vengeance would instantly plunge him into the bottomless pit. But such horrors in madness are like those in dreams; the maniac and the dreamer seem to undergo what could not possibly be undergone by one awake or in his senses; and indeed he says that after five months of this expectation he became so familiar with despair as to entertain a sort of hardiness and indifference as to the event." Some lines written just before his removal to Dr. Cotton's asylum, give us an insight into his state of mind at that period:

" Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,  
Scarce can endure delay of execution, —  
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my  
Soul in a moment.

" Damned below Judas; more abhorred than he was,  
Who for a few pence sold his holy master;  
Twice-betrayed Jesus, me, the last delinquent,  
Deems the profanest.

" Man disavows, and Deity disowns me,  
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;  
Therefore hell keeps her ever hungry mouths all  
Bolted against me!"

Is it possible to conceive the condition of a man who firmly believed the awful truth thus depicted with such nervous

and desperate power? But now mark the change. After an interval his mental symptoms improved; a visit from his brother, who was a fellow of one of the colleges at Cambridge, and in whose conversion on his death-bed the poet was afterwards made instrumental, served to put to flight as he says a thousand deliriums and delusions which he still labored under. At about the same time he found, during one of his walks in the garden, a Bible which had been purposely placed in his way. "The Lord was pleased to reveal himself in his word, and to draw the poor, desponding soul to his own bosom of infinite love." Let us quote from Cowper's own account of these memorable experiences: "Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement Christ had made, my pardon sealed in his blood, and all the fulness and completeness of his justification. Unless the almighty arm had been under me I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport; I could only look up to heaven with silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder. I lost no opportunity of repairing to a throne of grace, but flew to it with an earnestness irresistible and never to be satisfied. Could I help it? Could I do otherwise than love and rejoice in my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus? The Lord had enlarged my heart, and I ran in the way of his commandments. For many succeeding weeks tears were ready to flow if I did but speak of the gospel, or mention the name of Jesus. To rejoice day and night was all my employment. Too happy to sleep much, I thought it was lost time that was spent in slumber. My physician, ever watchful and apprehensive for my welfare, was now alarmed, lest the sudden transition from despair to joy should terminate in a fatal frenzy. But the Lord was my strength and song, and was become my salvation. I said, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. He hath chastened me sore, but hath not given me over unto death. O give thanks unto the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever.' In a short

time Dr. Cotton became satisfied, and acquiesced in the soundness of my cure; and much sweet communion I had with him concerning the things of our salvation." In Cowper's poem on Hope, the well-known passage commencing,

"So when a felon whom his country's laws,"

beautifully portrays this precious and marvellous transformation. While still continuing at St. Albans, he wrote a hymn entitled "The happy change," and took for his text a sentence from the Book of Revelation, "Behold, I make all things new." As Southey says: "The contrast is indeed striking between what he calls this specimen of his first Christian thoughts, and that song of despair which cannot be perused without shuddering:"

"How blest thy creature is, O God,  
When with a single eye  
He views the lustre of thy word,  
The day-spring from on high.

"Through all the storms that veil the skies  
And frown on earthly things,  
The sun of righteousness he eyes,  
With healing on his wings.

"Struck by that light, the human heart —  
A barren soil no more —  
Sends the sweet smell of grace abroad,  
Where serpents lurked before.

"The soul, a dreary province once  
Of Satan's dark domain,  
Feels a new empire formed within,  
And owns a heavenly reign.

"The glorious orb whose golden beams  
The fruitful year control,  
Since first obedient to thy word,  
He started from the goal,

"Has cheered the nations with the joys  
His orient rays impart;  
But Jesus, 't is thy light alone  
Can shine upon the heart."

Having resolved not to return to London, with its busy and exciting scenes, his friends arranged for him to reside

quietly at Huntingdon; and it was in view of his withdrawal from society and from his profession that he composed the sweet hymn, worthy, as has been said, of comparison with the best productions of Collins and Gray:

“Far from the world, O Lord, I flee,  
From strife and tumult far;  
From scenes where Satan wages still  
His most successful war.”

When with a remembrance of all the unspeakable agony through which Cowper passed during those dreadful months, and of that season of heavenly peace which ensued, we read his hymn, “There is a fountain filled with blood,” it is apparent that every line and sentence were called forth by his own experience. He had said, “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord”; and in these verses most sweetly has he done so. Not now with Judas Iscariot, but with the penitent thief, does he compare himself:

“The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day;  
And there have I, as vile as he,  
Washed all my sins away.”

In calm, heaven-given confidence thus he sang. Some compilers of hymns must have felt that either they or the people for whom they prepared their books, could not thus positively declare what the Lord had done for their souls; and they have therefore extracted all the assurance from this beautiful stanza, and have made it read,

“And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away.”

These counterfeit lines do not represent Cowper's feelings when he composed this hymn; he honored his Redeemer with an unqualified trust: in his own words, “he saw the sufficiency of the atonement Christ had made, his pardon sealed in his blood, and all the fulness and completeness of his justification.” Perhaps it was necessary for the Christian poet to have drunk to the dregs the bitter cup of despair, in order that he might the more understandingly and triumphantly

sing of salvation by grace. Certainly there is no other hymn of the same kind, which has obtained such a hold upon the warmest affection of the church; and without question, it will continue to be used in the service of the sanctuary, at the domestic altar, and in the closet,

“Till all the ransomed church of God  
Be saved, to sin no more.”

From Huntingdon Cowper removed to Olney, where he lived upon the most intimate and confidential terms with the excellent John Newton. Here, that collection of hymns was projected, which has been and is so greatly esteemed by Christians of every name, and which, as Mr. Newton suggests in the preface, “stands as a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship.” But Cowper had not proceeded far in this work when his distressing malady came back upon him. “The clouds returned after the rain.” His sun was clouded at noon, and although afterwards there were some gleams of light upon his horizon, the sky was never clear to him again; the gloom settled more and more densely around him, and he walked in darkness profound and awful, “darkness which might be felt,” until the blessed morning of his final deliverance, when as we believe, he was admitted to that city which “the glory of God doth lighten, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” We think the progress of his disorder may be traced in several of the Olney hymns; his last contribution to the collection, composed when despair was already seizing upon him, was that noble hymn which so wonderfully vindicates the ways of God to men:

“God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.”

The precious consolations of this hymn were ineffectual to heal the stricken heart of the singer, or perhaps it were more correct to say, they failed to withstand the approach of the mental disease with which he was afflicted; but oh, how many sinking souls have been buoyed up by these verses,

when all the waves and the billows of the Almighty were surging around them.

“ The nightingale sings best  
When her soft and downy breast  
Is bleeding with the thorn.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus was it with Cowper in the composition of this admirable hymn; and having uttered it, the Lord seems to have put his servant on trial, so that its testimony might be signally confirmed in the experience of its author.

During these tedious and mournful years Cowper's soul waited for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning. At one time he writes, “ the dealings of God with me are to myself utterly unintelligible. I have never met, either in books or conversation, with an experience at all similar to mine. More than a twelvemonth has passed since I began to hope that having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of the Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore, and I proposed to sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed.” Yet disappointed and disheartened though he was, not one word of murmuring or complaint is to be found in his letters; never did he question the wisdom of the Most High, or doubt his infinite love; never did he cease to adore and worship him. An expression of his in a dream which he records (1793), probably exhibits the sincere feeling of his heart towards the Lord. “ I love thee, even now,” said he to the Saviour, whose absence he so bitterly deplored,

<sup>1</sup> Cowper, in a hymn already alluded to, compares his soul in its devotional retirement to this timid recluse, of whom Milton sings in *Il Penseroso* :

“ Sweet bird, that shun'st the voice of folly,  
Most musical, most melancholy.”

He bore no resemblance to Wordsworth's “ ethereal minstrel, pilgrim of the sky,” the lark, to whom the poet says,

“ Leave to the nightingale her shady wood,  
A privacy of glorious light is thine.”

His own beautiful verse is,

“ There, like a nightingale, she pours  
Her solitary lays ;  
Nor asks a witness of her song,  
Nor thirsts for human praise.”

“more than many who see thee daily.” The same spirit of humility and resignation appears in the affecting lines :

“ He wounds, and hides the hand that gave the blow ;  
 He flies ; he reappears, and wounds again.  
 Was ever heart that loved thee treated so ?  
 Yet I adore thee, though it seem in vain.”

Wonderful faith ! Perhaps more like that of the Syro-Phoenician woman than any recorded in modern biography. Mr. Newton bears valuable testimony on this subject, in a letter dated May 26, 1774 : “ In the beginning of his disorder, when he was more capable of conversing than he was sometime afterwards, how often have I heard him adore and submit to the sovereignty of God, and declare, though in the most agonizing and inconceivable distress, he was so perfectly satisfied of the wisdom and rectitude of the Lord’s appointments, that if he was sure of relieving himself only by stretching out his hand, he would not do it, unless he was equally sure it was agreeable to his will that he should do it. I hope I shall never have so striking a proof of the integrity of any other friend, because I hope I shall never see any other in so dreadful a state of trial.”

While thus walking in spiritual darkness, Cowper achieved his reputation as a poet by the publication of *The Task* and other poems, but after the fatal year 1772 he wrote no more hymns except perhaps one or two for the use of the Sunday Schools in his neighborhood. His friend Mr. Bull requested him, in 1788, to resume his labors in this respect. Nothing could be more touching than his reply : “ My dear friend,” he says, “ ask possibilities, and they shall be performed ; but ask not for hymns from a man suffering by despair as I do. I could not sing the Lord’s song were it to save my life, banished as I am, not to a strange land, but to a remoteness from his presence, in comparison with which the distance from east to west is no distance — is vicinity and cohesion. I dare not, either in prose or verse, allow myself to express a frame of mind which I am conscious does not belong to me.”

But his tongue has long since been unloosed ; the golden

harp of which he sang is in his hand; and "redeeming love" is again and forever his joyful theme. Doubtless the promise has been, at least in part, fulfilled to him, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter"; and from his abode of peace and glory he seems to say to the doubting, struggling, weary ones of earth,

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace :  
Behind a frowning Providence  
He hides a smiling face.

"His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his work in vain ;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain."

We think there is an instance in the history of hymns and their authors, even more melancholy than that of Cowper. When one who has sung so joyfully of the fountain drawn from the veins of Immanuel loses all sense of the divine forgiveness and favor, and becomes possessed with the conviction that there can be no mercy for him, it is indeed sad. But although this was Cowper's experience, we are assured that the resignation and patience with which he endured honored the name of his Redeemer, whom not seeing, he loved;<sup>1</sup> and that by means of these sufferings the poet was made perfect for eternity. We feel differently, however, respecting the case of one who after composing some of the sweetest songs of praise to Christ, and after spending many years in the ministry of reconciliation, was tempted to deny the Lord who bought him, and by the preaching of another

<sup>1</sup> His own words are :

"My Saviour, whom absent I love,  
Whom not having seen I adore ;  
Whose name is exalted above  
All glory, dominion, and power."

gospel which yet was not another, to put him to an open shame. This was the course of Robert Robinson of Cambridge, England, who wrote "Come thou fount of heavenly blessing," "Mighty God, while angels bless thee," "Brightness of the Father's glory." Nothing can surpass the evangelical excellence of these hymns; but alas, their author renounced his faith, and by his later teachings sought to diminish the influence of the cross of Christ. What a fall was this for one who had put upon paper such sublime verses as the following:

"From the highest throne of glory  
To the cross of deepest woe,  
All to ransom guilty captives, —  
Flow my praise, forever flow.

"Re-ascend, immortal Saviour,  
Leave thy footstool, take thy throne;  
Thence return and reign forever,  
Be the kingdom all thine own."

Of course a man so changed could not be happy. His new views would not be likely to make him better satisfied with himself, with his fellow-men, or with the government of God. A circumstance narrated by Dr. Belcher, gives affecting confirmation of this. "In the latter part of his life, when Mr. Robinson seemed to have lost much of his devotional feeling, he was travelling in a stage coach with a lady who soon perceived that he was well acquainted with religion. She had just before been reading the hymn, "Come thou fount of every blessing," and asked his opinion of it, as she might properly do, since neither of them knew who the other was. He waived the subject, and turned her attention to some other topic; but after a short period she contrived to return to it, and described the benefit she had often derived from the hymn, and her strong admiration of its sentiments. She observed that the gentleman was strongly agitated, but as he was not dressed in clerical garb, did not suspect the cause. At length, entirely overcome by the power of his feelings, he burst into tears, and said: "Madam, I am

the poor, unhappy man who composed that hymn many years ago; and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I then had."

It would be interesting if our limits permitted, to notice the influence of one hymn-writer upon another, and especially to trace the connection between some of the ancient hymns of the church, and those of modern date.<sup>1</sup> There is for instance an evident relation between Bernard's hymn (687), "Jesus, the very thought of thee," and Doddridge's (432) "Jesus, I love thy charming name," and again, Newton's (441), "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds." It will repay one for the trouble to read the three together, and it will be seen that while each is a distinct and independent composition, the later productions were in all probability suggested by the former.

On the other hand it is striking to observe the contrast between the Emperor Adrian's celebrated *Apostrophe*, which gives the impressions of an intelligent heathen in the prospect of death, and the odes of Pope and Toplady, both of which are entitled "The dying Christian's Address to his Soul." (Doddridge's beautiful hymn bearing the same title, is in a different vein.) The darkness of the emperor's doubts is not enlivened by one ray of hope:

" Ah, fleeting spirit, wandering fire,  
That long hast warmed my tender breast,  
Must thou no more this frame inspire,  
No more a pleasing, cheerful guest?

" Whither, ah whither art thou flying?  
To what dark, undiscovered shore?

<sup>1</sup> Many parallels may be traced also between hymns and the secular poetry in our standard literature. It was only recently that we were struck with the similarity between a portion of Addison's composition,

"The spacious firmament on high,"

and the following lines in the "Merchant of Venice":

"Look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with features of bright gold.  
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st,  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims."

Thou seem'st all trembling, shivering, dying,  
And wit and humor are no more!"

This is Pope's translation ; and he must have had it in mind when he composed the following (1189), to which it is a relief to turn :

" Vital spark of heavenly flame,  
Quit, oh quit this mortal frame !  
Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying,  
Oh the pain — the bliss — of dying !  
Cease, fond-nature, cease thy strife,  
And let me languish into life.

" Hark ! they whisper ; angels say,  
Sister spirit, come away.  
What is this absorbs me quite,  
Steals my senses, shuts my sight,  
Drowns my spirits, draws my breath ?  
Tell me, my soul, can this be death ?

" The world recedes, it disappears ;  
Heaven opens on my eyes ; my ears  
With sounds seraphic ring :  
Lend, lend your wings ! I mount ! I fly !  
O grave, where is thy victory ?  
O death, where is thy sting ?

**Still** more evangelical and full of triumphant faith and holy assurance is the ode by Toplady :

" Deathless principle, arise ;  
Soar thou native of the skies ;  
Pearl of price, by Jesus bought,  
To his glorious likeness wrought,  
Go to shine before his throne,  
Deck his mediatorial crown ;  
Go, his triumph to adorn ;  
Born of God — to God return.

" Lo, he beckons from on high,  
Fearless to his presence fly ;  
Thine the merit of his blood,  
Thine the righteousness of God.  
Angels, joyful to attend,  
Hovering round thy pillow bend ;  
Wait to catch the signal given,  
And escort thee quick to heaven.

“Mount their transports to improve,  
Join the longing choir above,  
Swiftly to their wish be given,  
Kindle higher joy in heaven.”

It remains for us to refer briefly to the comfort and support afforded to believers by the use of hymns in the hour of death. There are cases upon record in which the reading of a hymn has been blessed to the hopeful conversion of a sinner in his last hours; and the instances are almost numberless in which Christians have recalled hymns dear to them in time of health, to confirm their own faith, and to express to those around them their triumphant joys and hopes in the immediate prospect of dissolution. Martyrs have sung in the dreadful hour of their sufferings. Thus we read that Jerome of Prague, on his way to the place of execution, sang several hymns. When the flames began to envelop him, he sang again, and the last words he was heard to articulate were “This soul in flames I offer, Christ, to thee.” And others to whom death has come with less of outward terror, have derived consolation, next to the words of holy scripture, from favorite and well-remembered hymns. Dr. Doddridge, himself one of the sweet singers of Israel, in his last sickness at Lisbon, when separated from all his relatives and Christian friends excepting only his faithful wife, was much comforted by a volume of Watts’s hymns which he found in the house where he was staying. At the urgent solicitation of Dr. Watts he had written the “Rise and Progress”; to him he had dedicated it when it was published; and now that, far from home and in a foreign land, he was anticipating and preparing for his release from earth, the holy compositions of this venerated friend, who had died two years previously, must have seemed to him like the strains of ministering angels who had been commissioned to convey him to his heavenly rest.

In the memoir of Dr. Payson, it is related that not long before his death some of the choir of his congregation came

for the purpose of singing for his gratification some of the songs of Zion. He selected the one commencing,\*

“ Rise my soul and stretch thy wings,”

part of the hymn,

“ I'll praise my Maker with my breath,”

and Doddridge's hymn entitled “ The Dying Christian's Address to his Soul,” beginning,

“ Ye golden lamps of heaven, farewell.”<sup>1</sup>

It is profitable to know what were the chosen hymns of so eminent a saint on his deathbed.

The favorite hymns of Dr. Nettleton in his last days were

“ Begone, unbelief, my Saviour is near,”

by Newton, to be found in the Village Hymn Book, and

“ Come let us join our friends above,” (869)

by Charles Wesley. An interesting anecdote is given by Dr. Belcher, in reference to the latter of these. Some years after Charles Wesley's death, and not long before his own decease, the Rev. John Wesley being in London, officiated on a certain occasion in his own chapel in the City Road. After the morning prayers had been read he ascended the pulpit, but instead of immediately announcing the hymn to be sung, to the great surprise of the congregation, he stood silent, with his eyes closed for, it is said, at least ten minutes, wrapt in intense thought. Recovering himself, and with a feeling

<sup>1</sup> When Goldsmith gave utterance to the lines,

“ And oft I wish amid the scene to find  
Some spot to real happiness consigned,  
Where my worn soul, each wandering hope at rest,  
*May gather bliss to see my fellows blest,*”

he probably did not know of the existence of the hymn referred to in the text, the last verse of which pointed to precisely such a paradise as that for which in his better moods he yearned, although lying far beyond the limits which his Traveller, “ remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,” had sought to penetrate:

“ There all the millions of his saints  
Shall in one song unite,  
*And each the bliss of all shall view  
With infinite delight.*”

which at once told where his spirit had been communing, he solemnly read the hymn,

“ Come, let us join our friends above,  
Who have obtained the prize,  
And on the eagle wings of love,  
To joy celestial rise.”

We can easily imagine the effect this scene produced on the minds of those present who had known both the brothers.

Coincidences sometimes occur in the use of hymns, which are deserving of notice. On a Sabbath evening not many years since, a young wife transcribed the following verses from one of Bonar's hymns :

“ Not first the bright, and after that the dark ;  
But first the dark, and after that the bright :  
First the thick cloud, and then the rainbow's arc ;  
First the dark grave, then resurrection light.

“ 'Tis first the night, stern night of storm and war,  
Long night of heavy clouds and veiled skies ;  
Then the fair sparkle of the Morning Star,  
That bids the saint awake and day arise.”

It was the last time she ever put pen to paper. On the following Sabbath her spirit ascended to its Saviour, leaving the body to slumber in hope until the dawn of the resurrection day. She had become a mother. The verses seemed suitable to her circumstances when she copied them, but she did not know how full of significance they would prove to be as her last written words. The copy, precious to surviving friends, was found after her death in her portfolio.

The hymn (1181)

“ When from my sight all fades away,”

written by Paul Eber, a friend of Melancthon, has long been a favorite with the dying. It is to be found unabridged in the *Lyra Germanica*, and commences,

“ Lord Jesus Christ, true man and God.”

Grotius requested that it might be repeated to him in his last moments, and died before its close. How pleasant to think of

these or other stanzas, as the ascending steps by which departing saints have gone up to the presence chamber of their King.

The late civil war in our country, furnished some incidents which illustrate this part of our subject. "A friend who visited the battle-field the day after the battle at Fort Donelson, found a little drummer-boy who was dying. His arm had been carried away by a cannon-ball, and he was singing:

"Nearer my God to thee,  
Nearer to thee."

"Perhaps the vision of a loved Sabbath school class or a happy home circle, in which this beautiful hymn had been learned, floated before the dying eyes of this little drummer-boy. His prayer is answered, 'Nearer to thee.'"

One of the agents of the American Tract Society, who visited the vicinity of Pittsburg Landing immediately after the terrible battle there, relates the following: "I found among the wounded a personal friend (a Baptist minister), who was a lieutenant, and who also officiated as chaplain. When the alarm was given on the Sabbath morning, he was performing funeral rites over the remains of one of his men, and some of those present afterwards declared that they never heard a man pray as he prayed upon that occasion. He was severely wounded early in the conflict, and as the rebels temporarily advanced, he lay within their lines for more than twenty-four hours, with his wounds undressed, and unable to procure a drop of water. During a portion of this time, the balls and shells were falling all around him; yet in the midst of the awful strife, and notwithstanding his sufferings, he told me that he there enjoyed some of the sweetest experiences of his life. He several times found himself unconsciously singing,

"When I can read my title clear  
To mansions in the skies,  
I'll bid farewell to every fear,  
And wipe my weeping eyes."

A day or two afterwards he safely reached his home.

Christian poets have not unfrequently derived comfort in their last days and hours from their own verses. We have already alluded to the Earl of Roscommon, who died while repeating his version of the *Dies Irae*. George Herbert on the Sunday before he died, rose suddenly from his bed or couch, called for one of his instruments, took it into his hands, and said :

“ My God, my God,  
My music shall find thee,  
And every string  
Shall have his attribute to sing.”

And having tuned it, he played and sang from his exquisite verses on “ Sunday ” :

“ The Sundays of man's life,  
Threaded together on time's string,  
Make bracelets to adorn the wife  
Of the eternal, glorious king.  
On Sunday heaven's gate stands ope,  
Blessings are plentiful and rife,  
More plentiful than hope.”

“ Thus,” says good old Izaak Walton, “ he sang on earth such hymns and anthems as the angels, and he and Mr. Farrer ” (a friend who procured the publication of his sacred poems), “ now sing in heaven.”

We cannot forbear allusion to the death of Toplady, whose many admirable hymns enrich all our collections. “ Oh,” said he, one day not long before his death, “ I enjoy heaven already in my soul ; to me sickness is no affliction, pain no curse, death itself is no dissolution ; if there were not some abatement of these ecstatic joys, I could not endure the weight.” At another time he exclaimed, “ Oh the delights of the third heaven ; my prayers are all converted into praise.” On making his usual visit one morning, the physician found Mr. Toplady apparently much improved in health ; the aspect of his case was much more encouraging. Turning to his patient he ventured to express a hope that his life might yet be prolonged. Mr. Toplady, raising his eyes flowing with rapture, while tears streamed down his cheeks,

exclaimed, "No, no ; I shall die ; for no mortal could endure such manifestations of God's glory as I have, and live." His prediction was verified ; he expired the next day singing one of his own hymns :

" Deathless principle, arise,  
Soar, thou native of the skies."

"His voice faltered, his eyes closed, and scarcely had the notes died away upon his lips e'er he took up the strain again in the immediate presence of that Saviour whom he loved with an ardor so intense, and served with a zeal so untiring." "Thus died at the early age of thirty-eight one of the brightest ornaments that ever adorned the English church." It has been said, "the religious experience of Mr. Toplady may be compared to a sky without a cloud, and if taken from the commencement to its triumphant close, stands perhaps alone in the annals of Christian biography."

This is the record of him who taught us to sing,

" Rock of ages cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee."

A hymn so utterly self-distrustful and so complete in its sole reliance upon the sufferings and death of Christ, could not have been composed, except under the very shadow of the cross. Had Toplady left no other legacy to the church, this single hymn would have been sufficient to endear him to us through all time ; yes, and through eternity. It is pleasant to know that the late illustrious and excellent Prince Consort of England repeated this hymn constantly upon his death-bed ; "For," said he, "if in this hour I had only my worldly honors and dignities to depend upon, I should be indeed poor."<sup>1</sup>

We will close with an account given by Mr. Christophers of the circumstances amid which Henry Francis Lyte, already referred to in these pages, composed his last hymn. The health of this faithful minister of the gospel had long been

<sup>1</sup> The original prefix of this hymn given by Mr. Toplady was "A Living and Dying Prayer for the Holiest Believer in the World," and was intended to be a protest against what the author supposed to be the Wesleyan view of Christian

failing, and he had been obliged to spend the winter in Italy during several succeeding years. In 1847, as the autumn advanced, he once more made his preparations for leaving England, but he had now become so greatly reduced in strength that it seemed doubtful whether he would be able to undertake the journey. He did go, however, but he never returned. Before leaving, he wished once more to preach to his people. His family feared what the result of such an effort might be, but he gently insisted, and was able to go through with the service. He knew that he was officiating for the last time, and his sermon was full of solemn and tender appeals to those whom he had guided and instructed for many years. He administered the communion also, and then retired exhausted in body, but with his soul sweetly resting on that Saviour whom he had preached with his dying breath. As the evening drew on, he handed to a member of his family the following verses, with his own music adapted to them :

“ Abide with me ! fast falls the eventide,  
The darkness deepens ; Lord, with me abide !  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, oh abide with me !

“ Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away ;  
Change and decay in all around I see,—  
Oh thou who changest not, abide with me !

“ Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word,  
But as thou dwell'st with thy disciples, Lord,  
Familiar, condescending, patient, free,  
Come, not to sojourn, but abide with me !

perfection. Mr. Gladstone, the English scholar and statesman, has rendered the hymn into Latin verse. We give the first stanza :

“ Jesus, pro me perforatus,  
Caudar intra tuum latus,  
Tu per lympham profluentem,  
Tu per sanguinem tepentem,  
In peccata mi redunda,  
Tolle culpam, sordes munda.”

“Thou on my head in early youth didst smile,  
And though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,  
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left thee ;  
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me !

“I need thy presence every passing hour,  
What but thy grace can foil the tempter’s power ?  
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be ?  
Through cloud and sunshine, oh abide with me !

“I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless,  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death’s sting ? Where, grave, thy victory ?  
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.

“Hold then thy cross before my closing eyes,  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies ;  
Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee, —  
In life and death, O Lord, abide with me.”

This was his last hymn on earth. He reached Nice, and shortly after his spirit entered into rest. He pointed upward as he passed away, and whispered, “Peace, joy !” Thus he went to abide forever with him, who has declared it to be his divine will that his followers be with him where he is, that they may behold his glory.

---

## ARTICLE VIII.

### THE RELATIONS OF GEOLOGY TO THEOLOGY.

BY PROF. C. H. HITCHCOCK, NEW YORK CITY.

THE object of the following pages is to present the relations of Geology to the several doctrines of Theology in their natural order. It is not necessary now to apologize for attempting to illustrate revelation by science. Thanks to honored names that battle has been fought, and the natural sciences are now copiously employed for the defence and illustration of religious truth. Few of the sciences afford better illustrations of biblical statement than geology. Its