

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE MEMORABLE HYMN.

A Sermon

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'And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.'—
Matthew xxvi. 30.

THE occasion on which these words were spoken was the last meal of which Jesus partook in company with his disciples before he went from them to his shameful trial and his ignominious death. It was his farewell supper before a bitter parting, and yet they needs must sing. He was on the brink of that great depth of misery into which he was about to plunge, and yet he would have them sing "an hymn." It is wonderful that HE sang, and in a second degree it is remarkable that THEY sang. We will consider both these singular facts.

I. Let us dwell a while ON THE FACT THAT JESUS SANG AT SUCH A TIME AS THIS. What does he teach us by this?

Does he not say to each of us, his followers, "*My religion is one of happiness and joy*: I, your Master, by my example, would instruct you to sing even when the last solemn hour is come, and all the glooms of death are gathering around you; here, at the table, I am your Singing-master, and set you lessons in music, in which my dying voice shall lead you: notwithstanding all the griefs which overwhelm my heart, I will be to you the Chief Musician, and the Sweet Singer of Israel"? If ever there was a time when it would have been natural and consistent with the solemnities of the occasion for the Saviour to have bowed his head upon the table, bursting into a flood of tears; or, if ever there was a season when he might have fittingly retired from all company, and have bewailed his coming conflict in sighs and groans, it was just then. But no; that brave heart will sing "an hymn." Our glorious Jesus plays the man beyond all other men. Boldest of the sons of men, he quails not in the hour of battle, but tunes his voice to loftiest psalmody. The genius of that Christianity of which Jesus is the Head and Founder, its object, spirit, and design, are happiness and joy, and they who receive it are able to sing in the very jaws of death.

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This remark, however, is quite a secondary one to the next. *Our Lord's complete fulfilment of the law is even more worthy of our attention.* It was customary, when the Passover was held, to sing, and this is the main reason why the Saviour did so. During the Passover, it was usual to sing the hundred and thirteenth, and five following Psalms, which were called the "*Hallel*." The first commences, you will observe, in our version, with "Praise ye the Lord!" or, "Hallelujah!" The hundred and fifteenth, and the three following, were usually sung as the closing song of the Passover. Now, our Saviour would not diminish the splendour of the great Jewish rite, although it was the last time that he would celebrate it. No; there shall be the holy beauty and delight of psalmody; none of it shall be stinted; the "*Hallel*" shall be full and complete.

We may safely believe that the Saviour sang through, or probably chanted, the whole of these six Psalms; and my heart tells me that there was no one at the table who sang more devoutly or more cheerfully than did our blessed Lord. There are some parts of the hundred and eighteenth Psalm, especially, which strike us as having sounded singularly grand, as they flowed from his blessed lips. Note verses 22, 23, 24. Particularly observe those words, near the end of the Psalm, and think you hear the Lord himself singing them, "God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever."

Because, then, it was the settled custom of Israel to recite or sing these Psalms, our Lord Jesus Christ did the same; for he would leave nothing unfinished. Just as, when he went down into the waters of baptism, he said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," so he seemed to say, when sitting at the table, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness; therefore let us sing unto the Lord, as God's people in past ages have done." Beloved, let us view with holy wonder the strictness of the Saviour's obedience to his Father's will, and let us endeavour to follow in his steps, in all things, seeking to be obedient to the Lord's Word in the little matters as well as in the great ones.

May we not venture to suggest another and deeper reason? Did not the singing of "an hymn" at the supper show *the holy absorption of the Saviour's soul in his Father's will*? If, beloved, you knew that at—say, ten o'clock to-night, you would be led away to be mocked, and despised, and scourged, and that to-morrow's sun would see you falsely accused, hanging, a convicted criminal, to die upon a cross, do you think that you could sing to-night, after your last meal? I am sure you could not, unless with more than earth-born courage and resignation your soul could say, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." You would sing if your spirit were like the Saviour's spirit; if, like him, you could exclaim, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt;" but if there should remain in you any selfishness, any desire to be spared the

bitterness of death, you would not be able to chant the "Hallel" with the Master. Blessed Jesus, how wholly wert thou given up! how perfectly consecrated! so that, whereas other men sing when they are marching to their joys, thou didst sing on the way to death; whereas other men lift up their cheerful voices when honour awaits them, thou hadst a brave and holy sonnet on thy lips when shame, and spitting, and death were to be thy portion.

This singing of the Saviour also teaches us *the whole-heartedness of the Master in the work which he was about to do*. The patriot-warrior sings as he hastens to battle; to the strains of martial music he advances to meet the foeman; and even thus the heart of our all-glorious Champion supplies him with song even in the dreadful hour of his solitary agony. He views the battle, but he dreads it not; though in the contest his soul will be "exceeding sorrowful even unto death," yet before it, he is like Job's war-horse, "he saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha; and he smelleth the battle afar off." He has a baptism to be baptized with, and he is straitened until it be accomplished. The Master does not go forth to the agony in the garden with a cowed and trembling spirit, all bowed and crushed in the dust; but he advances to the conflict like a man who has his full strength about him—taken out to be a victim (if I may use such a figure), not as a worn-out ox that has long borne the yoke, but as the firstling of the bullock, in the fulness of his strength. He goes forth to the slaughter, with his glorious undaunted spirit fast and firm within him, glad to suffer for his people's sake, and for his Father's glory.

"For as at first thine all-pervading look
Saw from thy Father's bosom to th' abyss,
Measuring in calm presage
The infinite descent;
So to the end, though now of mortal pangs
Made heir, and emptied of thy glory a while,
With unaverted eye
Thou meetest all the storm."

Let us, O fellow-heirs of salvation, learn to sing when our suffering time comes, when our season for stern labour approaches; ay, let us pour forth a canticle of deep, mysterious, melody of bliss, when our dying hour is near at hand! Courage, brother! The waters are chilly; but fear will not by any means diminish the terrors of the river. Courage, brother! Death is solemn work; but playing the coward will not make it less so. Bring out the silver trumpet; let thy lips remember the long-loved music, and let the notes be clear and shrill as thou dippest thy feet in the Jordan: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Dear friends, let the remembrance of the melodies of that upper room go with you to-morrow into business; and if you expect a great trial, and are afraid you will not be able to sing after it, then sing before it comes. Get your holy praise-work done before

affliction mars the tune. Fill the air with music while you can. While yet there is bread upon the table, sing, though famine may threaten; while yet the child runs laughing about the house, while yet the flush of health is in your own cheek, while yet your goods are spared, while yet your heart is whole and sound, lift up your song of praise to the Most High God; and let your Master, the singing Saviour, be in this your goodly and comfortable example.

II. We will now consider THE SINGING OF THE DISCIPLES. *They* united in the "Hallel"—like true Jews, they joined in the national song. Israel had good cause to sing at the Passover, for God had wrought for his people what he had done for no other nation on the face of the earth. Every Hebrew must have felt his soul elevated and rejoiced on the Paschal night. He was "a citizen of no mean city", and the pedigree which he could look back upon was one, compared with which kings and princes were but of yesterday.

Remembering the fact commemorated by the Paschal supper, Israel might well rejoice. They sang of their nation in bondage, trodden beneath the tyrannical foot of Pharaoh; they began the Psalm right sorrowfully, as they thought of the bricks made without straw, and of the iron furnace; but the strain soon mounted from the deep bass, and began to climb the scale, as they sang of Moses the servant of God, and of the Lord appearing to him in the burning bush. They remembered the mystic rod, which became a serpent, and which swallowed up the rods of the magicians; their music told of the plagues and wonders which God had wrought upon Zoan; and of that dread night when the first-born of Egypt fell before the avenging sword of the angel of death, while they themselves, feeding on the lamb which had been slain for them, and whose blood was sprinkled upon the lintel and upon the side-posts of the door, had been graciously preserved. Then the song went up concerning the hour in which all Egypt was humbled at the feet of Jehovah, whilst as for his people, he led them forth like sheep, by the hand of Moses and Aaron, and they went by the way of the sea, even of the Red Sea. The strain rose higher still as they tuned the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb. Jubilantly they sang of the Red Sea, and of the chariots of Pharaoh which went down into the midst thereof, and the depths covered them till there was not one of them left. It was a glorious chant indeed when they sang of Rahab cut in pieces, and of the dragon wounded at the sea, by the right hand of the Most High, for the deliverance of the chosen people.

But, beloved, if I have said that Israel could so properly sing, *what shall I say of those of us who are the Lord's spiritually redeemed?* We have been emancipated from a slavery worse than that of Egypt: "with a high hand and with an outstretched arm," hath God delivered us. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God's Passover, has been sprinkled on our hearts and consciences. By faith we keep the Passover, for we have been spared; we have been brought out of Egypt; and though our sins did once oppose us, they have all been drowned in the Red Sea of the atoning blood of Jesus: "the depths have covered them. there is not one of them

left." If the Jew could sing a "great Hallel", our "Hallel" ought to be more glowing still; and if every house in "Judæa's happy land" was full of music when the people ate the Paschal feast, much more reason have we for filling every heart with sacred harmony to-night, while we feast upon Jesus Christ, who was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood.

III. The time has now come for me to say HOW EARNESTLY I DESIRE YOU TO "SING AN HYMN."

I do not mean to ask you to use your voices, but let your hearts be brimming with the essence of praise. Whenever we repair to the Lord's table, which represents to us the Passover, we ought not to come to it as to a funeral. Let us select solemn hymns, but not dirges. Let us sing softly, but none the less joyfully. This is no burial feast; these are not funeral cakes which lie upon this table, and yonder fair white linen cloth is no winding-sheet. "This is my body," said Jesus, but the body so represented was no corpse; we feed upon a living Christ. The blood set forth by yonder wine is the fresh life-blood of our immortal King. We view not our Lord's body as clay-cold flesh, pierced with wounds, but as glorified at the right hand of the Father. We hold a happy festival when we break bread on the first day of the week. We come not hither trembling like bondsmen, cringing before the Lord as wretched serfs condemned to eat on their knees; we approach as freemen to our Lord's banquet, like his apostles, to recline at length or sit at ease; not merely to eat bread which may belong to the most sorrowful, but to drink wine which belongs to men whose souls are glad. Let us recognize the rightness, yea, the duty of cheerfulness at this commemorative supper; and, therefore, let us sing an hymn."

Being satisfied on this point, perhaps you ask, "*What hymn shall we sing?*" Many sorts of hymns were sung in the olden time: look down the list, and you will scarcely find one which may not suit us now.

One of the earliest of earthy songs was the *war-song*. They sang of old a song to the conqueror, when he returned from the battle. "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Women took their timbrels, and rejoiced in the dance when the hero returned from the war. Even thus, of old, did the people of God extol him for his mighty acts, singing aloud with the high-sounding cymbals: "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously . . . The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name." My brethren, let us lift up a war-song to-night! Why not? "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save." Come, let us praise our Emmanuel, as we see the head of our foe in his right hand; as we behold him leading captivity captive, ascending up on high, with trumpets' joyful sound, let us chant the pæan; let us shout the war-song, "*Io Triumphe!*" Behold, he comes, all-glorious from the war: as we gather at this festive table, which reminds us both of his conflict and of his victory, let us salute him

with a psalm of gladsome triumph, which shall be but the prelude of the song we expect to sing when we get up—

“Where all the singers meet.”

Another early form of song was *the pastoral*. When the shepherds sat down amongst the sheep, they tuned their pipes, and warbled forth soft and sweet airs in harmony with rustic quietude. All around was calm and still; the sun was brightly shining, and the birds were making melody among the leafy branches. Shall I seem fanciful if I say, “Let us unite in a pastoral to-night”? Sitting round the table, why should we not sing, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters”? If there be a place beneath the stars where one might feel perfectly at rest and ease, surely it is at the table of the Lord. Here, then, let us sing to our great Shepherd a pastoral of delight. Let the bleating of sheep be in our ears as we remember the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his flock.

You need not to be reminded that the ancients were very fond of *festive songs*. When they assembled at their great festivals, led by their chosen minstrels, they sang right joyously, with boisterous mirth. Let those who will speak to the praise of wine, my soul shall extol the precious blood of Jesus; let who will laud corn and oil, the rich produce of the harvest, my heart shall sing of the Bread which came down from heaven, whereof, if a man eateth, he shall never hunger. Speak ye of royal banquets, and minstrelsy fit for a monarch’s ear? Ours is a nobler festival, and our song is sweeter far. Here is room at this table to-night for all earth’s poesy and music, for the place deserves songs more lustrous with delight, more sparkling with gems of holy mirth, than any of which the ancients could conceive.

The *love-song* we must not forget, for that is peculiarly the song of this evening. “Now will I sing unto my Well-beloved a song.” His love to us is an immortal theme; and as our love, fanned by the breath of heaven, bursts into a vehement flame, we may sing, yea, and we will sing among the lilies, a song of loves.

In the Old Testament, we find many Psalms called by the title, “*A Song of Degrees*.” This “*Song of Degrees*” is supposed by some to have been sung as the people ascended the temple steps, or made pilgrimages to the holy place. The strain often changes, sometimes it is dolorous, and anon it is gladsome; at one season, the notes are long drawn out and heavy, at another, they are cheerful and jubilant. We will sing a “*Song of Degrees*” to-night. We will mourn that we pierced the Lord, and we will rejoice in pardon bought with blood. Our strain must vary as we talk of sin, feeling its bitterness, and lamenting it, and then of pardon, rejoicing in its glorious fullness.

David wrote a considerable number of Psalms which he entitled, “*Maschil*”, which may be called in English, “*instructive Psalms*.” Where, beloved, can we find richer instruction than at the table of our Lord? He who understands the mystery of incarnation, and of substitution, is a master in Scriptural theology. There is more

teaching in the Saviour's body and in the Saviour's blood than in all the world besides. O ye who wish to learn the way to comfort, and how to tread the royal road to heavenly wisdom, come ye to the cross, and see the Saviour suffer, and pour out his heart's blood for human sin!

Some of David's Psalms are called, "*Michtam*", which means "golden Psalm." Surely we must sing one of these. Our psalms must be golden when we sing of the Head of the Church, who is as much fine gold. More precious than silver or gold is the inestimable price which he has paid for our ransom. Yes, ye sons of harmony, bring your most melodious anthems here, and let your Saviour have your golden psalms!

Certain Psalms in the Old Testament are entitled, "*Upon Shoshannim*," that is, "Upon the lilies." O ye virgin souls, whose hearts have been washed in blood, and have been made white and pure, bring forth your instruments of song;—

"Hither, then, your music bring,
Strike aloud each cheerful string!"

Let your hearts, when they are in their best state, when they are purest, and most cleansed from earthly dross, give to Jesus their glory and their excellence.

Then there are other Psalms which are dedicated "*To the sons of Korah*." If the guess be right, the reason why we get the title, "To the sons of Korah"—"a song of loves"—must be this: that when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed up, the sons of Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up, too; but the sons of Korah perished not. Why they were not destroyed, we cannot tell. Perhaps it was that sovereign grace spared those whom justice might have doomed; and "the sons of Korah" were ever after made the sweet singers of the sanctuary; and whenever there was a special "song of loves", it was always dedicated to them. Ah! we will have one of those songs of love to-night, around the table, for we, too, are saved by distinguishing grace. We will sing of the heavenly Lover, and the many waters which could not quench his love.

We have not half exhausted the list, but it is clear that, sitting at the Lord's table, we shall have no lack of suitable psalmody. Perhaps no one hymn will quite meet the sentiments of all; and while we would not write a hymn for you, we would pray the Holy Spirit to write now the spirit of praise upon your hearts, that, sitting here, you may "after supper" sing "an hymn."

IV. For one or two minutes let us ask, WHAT SHALL THE TUNE BE?

It must be a strange one, for if we are to sing "an hymn" to-night, around the table, *the tune must have all the parts of music*. Yonder believer is heavy of heart through manifold sorrows, bereavements, and watchings by the sick. He loves his Lord, and would fain praise him, but his soul refuses to use her wings. Brother, we will have a tune in which you can join, and you shall lead the bass. You shall sing of your fellowship with your Beloved in his sufferings; how he, too, lost a friend; how he spent whole nights in sleeplessness; how his soul was exceedingly sorrowful.

But the tune must not be all bass, or it would not suit some of us to-night, for we can reach the highest note. We have seen the Lord, and our spirit has rejoiced in God our Saviour. We want to lift the chorus high; yea, there are some here who are at times so full of joy that they will want special music written for them. "Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell;" said Paul, and so have others said since, when Christ has been with them. Ah! then they have been obliged to mount to the highest notes, to the very loftiest range of song.

Remember, beloved, that the same Saviour, who will accept the joyful shoutings of the strong, will also receive the plaintive notes of the weak and weeping. You little ones, you babes in grace, may cry, "Hosanna," and the King will not silence you; and you strong men, with all your power of faith, may shout, "Hallelujah!" and your notes shall be accepted, too.

Come, then, let us have a tune in which we can all unite; but ah! we cannot make one which will suit the dead,—the dead, I mean, "in trespasses and sins,"—and there are some such here. Oh, may God open their mouths, and unloose their tongues; but as for those of us who are alive unto God, let us, as we come to the table, all contribute our own share of the music, and so make up a song of blended harmony, with many parts, one great united song of praise to Jesus our Lord!

We should not choose a tune for the communion table which is not very soft. These are no boisterous themes with which we have to deal when we tarry here. A bleeding Saviour, robed in a vesture dyed with blood,—this is a theme which you must treat with loving gentleness, for everything that is coarse is out of place. While the tune is soft, *it must also be sweet.* Silence, ye doubts; be dumb, ye fears; be hushed, ye cares! Why come ye here? My music must be sweet and soft when I sing of him. But oh! *it must also be strong;* there must be a full swell in my praise. Draw out the stops, and let the organ swell the diapason! In fulness let its roll of thundering harmony go up to heaven; let every note be sounded at its loudest. "Praise ye him upon the cymbals, upon the high-sounding cymbals; upon the harp with a solemn sound." Soft, sweet, and strong, let the music be.

Alas! you complain that your soul is out of tune. Then ask the Master to tune the heart-strings. Those "Selahs" which we find so often in the Psalms, are supposed by many scholars to mean, "Put the harp-strings in tune:" truly we require many "Selahs", for our hearts are constantly unstrung. Oh, that to-night the Master would enable each one of us to offer that tuneful prayer which we so often sing,—

"Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above:
Praise the mount—oh, fix me on it,
Mount of God's unchanging love!"

V. We close by enquiring, WHO SHALL SING THIS HYMN?

Sitting around the Father's board, we will raise a joyful song,

but who shall do it? "I will," saith one; "and we will," say others. What is the reason why so many are willing to join? The reason is to be found in the verse we were singing just now,—

"When he's the subject of the song,
Who can refuse to sing?"

What! a Christian silent when others are praising his Master? No; he must join in the song. Satan tries to make God's people dumb, but he cannot, for the Lord has not a tongue-tied child in all his family. They can all speak, and they can all cry, even if they cannot all sing, and I think there are times when they can all sing; yea, they must, for you know the promise, "Then shall the tongue of the dumb sing." Surely, when Jesus leads the tune, if there should be any silent ones in the Lord's family, they must begin to praise the name of the Lord. After Giant Despair's head had been cut off, Christiana and Mr. Greatheart, and all the rest of them, brought out the best of the provisions, and made a feast, and Mr. Bunyan says that, after they had feasted, they danced. In the dance there was one remarkable dancer, namely, Mr. Ready-to-Halt. Now, Mr. Ready-to-Halt usually went upon crutches, but for once he laid them aside. "And," says Bunyan, "I warrant you he footed it well!" This is quaintly showing us that, sometimes, the very sorrowful ones, the Ready-to-Halts, when they see Giant Despair's head cut off, when they see death, hell, and sin led in triumphant captivity at the wheels of Christ's victorious chariot, feel that even *they* must for once indulge in a song of gladness. So, when I put the question to-night, "Who will sing?" I trust that Ready-to-Halt will promise, "I will."

You have not much comfort at home, perhaps; by very hard work you can earn that little. Sunday is to you a day of true rest, for you are worked very cruelly all the week. Those cheeks of yours, poor girl, are getting very pale, and who knows but what Hood's pathetic lines may be true of you?—

"Stitch, stitch, stitch,
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
Sewing at once, with a double thread,
A shroud as well as a shirt."

But, my sister, you may surely rejoice to-night in spite of all this. There may be little on earth, but there is much in heaven. There may be but small comfort for you here apart from Christ; but oh, when, by faith, you mount into his glory, your soul is glad. You shall be as rich as the richest to-night if the Holy Spirit shall but bring you to the table, and enable you to feed upon your Lord and Master. Perhaps you have come here to-night when you ought not to have done so. The physician would have told you to keep to your bed, but you persisted in coming up to the house where the Lord has so often met with you. I trust that we shall hear your voice in the song. There appear to have been, in David's day, many things to silence the praise of God, but David was one who would sing. I like that expression of his, where the devil seems to

come up, and put his hand on his mouth, and say, "Be quiet." "No," says David, "I will sing." Again the devil tries to quiet him, but David is not to be silenced, for three times he puts it, "I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord." May the Lord make you resolve, this night, that you will praise the Lord Jesus with all your heart!

Alas! there are many of you here whom I could not invite to this feast of song, and who could not truly come if you were invited. Your sins are not forgiven; your souls are not saved; you have not trusted Christ; you are still in nature's darkness, still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. Must it always be so? Will you destroy yourselves? Have you made a league with death, and a covenant with hell? Mercy lingers! Longsuffering continues! Jesus waits! Remember that he hung upon the cross for sinners such as you are, and that if you believe in him now, you shall be saved. One act of faith, and all the sin you have committed is blotted out. A single glance of faith's eye to the wounds of the Messiah, and your load of iniquity is rolled into the depths of the sea, and you are forgiven in a moment!

"Oh!" says one, "would God I could believe!" Poor soul, may God help thee to believe now! God took upon himself our flesh; Christ was born among men, and suffered on account of human guilt, being made to suffer "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Christ was punished in the room, place, and stead of every man and woman who will believe on him. If you believe on him, he was punished for you; and you will never be punished. Your debts are paid, your sins are forgiven. God cannot punish you, for he has punished Christ instead of you, and he will never punish twice for one offence. To believe is to trust. If you will now trust your soul entirely with him, you are saved, for he loved you, and gave himself for you. When you know this, and feel it to be true, then come to the Lord's table, and join with us, when, AFTER SUPPER WE SING OUR HYMN,—

" 'It is finished!'—Oh what pleasure,
Do these charming words afford!
Heavenly blessings without measure
Flow to us from Christ the Lord:
'It is finished!'
Saints, the dying words record.

"Tune your harps anew, ye seraphs,
Join to sing the pleasing theme;
All on earth, and all in heaven,
Join to praise Immanuel's name;
Hallelujah!
Glory to the bleeding Lamb!"