

MARY'S SONG

"And Mary said, My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."

Luke 1:46, 47

MARY was on a visit when she expressed her joy in the language of this noble song. It were well if all our social communion were as useful to our hearts as this visit was to Mary. "Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." Mary, full of faith, goes to see Elizabeth, who is also full of holy confidence and the two are not long together before their faith mounts to full assurance and their full assurance bursts forth in a torrent of sacred praise!

This praise aroused their slumbering powers and instead of two ordinary village women, we see before us two prophetesses and poetesses upon whom the Spirit of God abundantly rested. When we meet with our kinsfolk and acquaintance, let it be our prayer to God that our communion may be not only pleasant, but profitable. Let us pray that we may not merely pass away time and spend a pleasant hour, but may advance a day's march nearer Heaven and acquire greater fitness for our eternal rest!

Observe, this morning, the sacred joy of Mary that you may imitate it. This is a season when all men expect us to be joyous. We compliment each other with the desire that we may have a "Merry Christmas." Some Christians who are a little squeamish do not like the word "merry." It is a right good old Saxon word, having the joy of childhood and the mirth of manhood in it. It brings before one's mind the old song of the midnight peal of bells, the holly and the blazing log.

I love it for its place in that most tender of all parables, where it is written, that, when the long-lost prodigal returned to his father safe and sound, "They began to be merry." This is the season when we are expected to be happy. And my heart's desire is that in the highest and best sense, you who are Believers may be "merry."

Mary's heart was merry within her—but here was the mark of her joy—it was all holy merriment, it was every drop of it sacred mirth. It was not such merriment as worldlings will revel in today and tomorrow, but such merriment as the angels have around the Throne of God, where they sing, "Glory to God in the highest," while we sing, "On earth peace, goodwill towards men." Such merry hearts have a continual feast.

I want you, you children of the bride-chamber, to possess today and tomorrow, yes, all your days, the high and consecrated bliss of Mary that you may not only read her words but use them for yourselves, ever experiencing their meaning—"My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Observe, first, that she sings. Secondly, she sings sweetly. Thirdly, shall she sing alone?

1. First observe that MARY SINGS. Her subject is a Savior. She hails the Incarnate God. The long expected Messiah is about to appear. He for whom Prophets and princes waited long is now about to come—to be born of the virgin of Nazareth. Truly there was never a subject of sweeter song than this—the stooping down of Godhead to the feebleness of manhood! When God manifested His power in the works of His hands the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy. But when God manifests Himself, what music shall suffice for the grand Psalm of adoring wonder?

When wisdom and power are seen, these are but attributes. But in the Incarnation it is the Divine Person which is revealed wrapped in a veil of our inferior clay—well might Mary sing when earth

and Heaven even now are wondering at the condescending Grace! Worthy of peerless music is the fact that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” There is no longer a great gulf fixed between God and His people. The humanity of Christ has bridged it over. We can no more think that God sits on high indifferent to the wants and woes of men—for God has visited us and come down to the lowliness of our estate.

We no longer need bemoan that we can never participate in the moral glory and purity of God, for if God in Glory that starry way that the redeemed one may sit down forever on His Throne. Let us dream no longer in somber sadness that we cannot draw near to God so that He will really hear our prayer and pity our necessities seeing that Jesus has become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh! He was born a babe as we are born, living a man as we must live, bearing the same infirmities and sorrows and bowing His head to the same death.

O, can we not come with boldness by this new and living way and have access to the Throne of the heavenly Grace, when Jesus meets us as Immanuel, God with us? Angels sung, they scarcely knew why. Could they understand why God had become Man? They must have known that here was a mystery of condescension. But all the loving consequences which the Incarnation involved, even their acute minds could scarcely have guessed!

But we see the whole and comprehend the grand design most fully. The manger of Bethlehem was big with Glory—in the Incarnation was wrapped up all the blessedness by which a soul, snatched from the depths of sin, is lifted up to the heights of Glory. Shall not our clearer knowledge lead us to heights of song which angelic guesses could not reach? Shall the lips of cherubs move to flaming sonnets and shall we, who are redeemed by the blood of the Incarnate God, be treacherously and ungratefully silent?—

*“Did archangels sing Your coming?
Did the shepherds learn their ways?
Shame would cover me ungrateful,
Should my tongues refuse to praise.”*

This, however, was not the full subject of her holy hymn. Her peculiar delight was not that there was a Savior to beborn, but that He was to be born of her! Blessed among women was she and highly favored of the Lord. But we can enjoy the same favor—no, we must enjoy it—or the coming of a Savior will be of no benefit to us. Christ on Calvary, I know, takes away the sin of His people. But none would have ever known the virtue of Christ upon the Cross unless they have the Lord Jesus formed in them as the hope of Glory!

The stress of the virgin’s canticle is laid upon God’s special Grace to her. Those little words, the personal pronouns, tell us that it was truly a personal affair with her. “My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.” The Savior was peculiarly and in a special sense, hers. She sung no “Christ for all,” but “Christ for me,” as her glad subject! Beloved, is Christ Jesus in your heart? Once you looked at Him from a distance and that look cured you of all spiritual diseases, but are you now living upon Him, receiving Him into your very vitals as your spiritual meat and drink?

In holy fellowship you have oftentimes fed upon His flesh and been made to drink of His blood. You have been buried with Him in Baptism unto death. You have yielded yourselves a sacrifice to Him and you have taken Him to be a sacrifice for you. You can sing of Him as the spouse did, “His left hand is under my head and His right hand does embrace me... My beloved is mine and I am His: He feeds among the lilies.”

This is a happy style of living and anything short of this poor slavish work, oh, you can never know the joy of Mary unless Christ becomes truly and really yours! But oh, when He is yours, yours within, reigning in your heart! Yours controlling all your passions! Yours changing your nature, subduing your corruptions, inspiring you with hallowed emotions! When He is yours

within, a joy unspeakable and full of Glory—oh, then you can sing, you must sing—who can restrain your tongue? If all the scoffers and mockers upon earth should bid you hold your peace, you must sing—your spirit must rejoice in God your Savior!

We should miss much instruction if we overlooked the fact that the choice poem before us is a hymn of faith. As yet there was no Savior born, nor, as far as we can judge had the virgin any evidence such as carnal sense required to make her believe that a Savior would be born of her. How can this thing be, was a question which might very naturally have suspended her song until it received an answer convincing to flesh and blood. But no such answer had been given. She knew that with God all things are possible. She had His promise delivered by an angel and this was enough for her—on the strength of the Word which came forth from God her heart leaped with pleasure and her tongue glorified His name! When I consider what it is which she believed and how unhesitatingly she received the Word, I am ready to give her, as a woman, a place almost as high as that which Abraham occupied as a man!

And if I dare not call her the mother of the faithful, at least let her have due honor as one of the most excellent of the mothers in Israel. The benediction of Elizabeth, Mary right well deserved, “Blessed is she that believes.” To her the “substance of things hoped for” was her faith and that was also her “evidence of things not seen.” She knew, by the Revelation of God, that she was to bear the promised Seed who should bruise the serpent’s head. But other proof she had none.

This day there are those among us who have little or no conscious enjoyment of the Savior’s Presence. They walk in darkness and see no light. They are groaning over inbred sin and mourning because corruptions prevail. Let them now trust in the Lord and remember that if they believe on the Son of God, Christ Jesus is within them. And by faith they may right gloriously chant the hallelujah of adoring love. Though the sun gleam not forth today, the clouds and mists have not quenched his light. And though the Sun of Righteousness shines not on you at this instant, yet He keeps His place in yonder skies and knows no variableness, neither shadow of a turning. If with all your digging the well springs not up, yet there abides a constant fullness in that deep which crouches beneath in the heart and purpose of a God of Love. What, if like David, you are much cast down, yet like he can you say unto your soul, “Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.”

Be glad then with Mary’s joy—it is the joy of a Savior completely hers—but evidenced to be so, not by sense, but by faith. Faith has its music as well as sense, but it is of a more Divine sort—if the food on the table make men sing and dance, feastings of a more refined and ethereal nature can fill Believers with a hallowed plenitude of delight! Still listening to the favored virgin’s canticle, let me observe that her lowliness does not make her stay her song. No, it imports a sweeter note into it—“For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.”

Beloved Friend, you are feeling more intensely than ever the depth of your natural depravity. You are humbled under a sense of your many failings. You are so dead and earth-bound even in this House of Prayer that you cannot rise to God. You are heavy and sad, even while our Christmas carols have been ringing in your ears. You feel yourself to be today so useless to the Church of God, so insignificant, so utterly unworthy, that your unbelief whispers, “Surely, surely, you have nothing to sing for.”

Come, my Brother, come my Sister, imitate this blessed virgin of Nazareth and turn that very lowliness and meanness which you so painfully feel into another reason for unceasing praise! Daughters of Zion, sweetly say in your hymns of love, “He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.” The less worthy I am of His favors, the more sweetly will I sing of His Grace! What if I am the most insignificant of all His chosen? Then will I praise Him who with eyes of love has sought me out and set His love upon me. “I thank You, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that while You have hid these things from the wise and prudent, You have revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight.”

I am sure, dear Friends, the remembrance that there is a Savior and that this Savior is yours, must make you sing. And if you set side by side with it the thought that you were once sinful, unclean,

vile, hateful and an enemy to God—then your notes will take yet a loftier flight and mount to the third heavens to teach the golden harps the praise of God!

It is right well worthy of notice that the greatness of the promised blessing did not give the sweet songster an argument for suspending her thankful strain. When I meditate upon the great goodness of God in loving His people before the earth was, in laying down His life for us, in pleading our cause before the Eternal Throne, in providing a paradise of rest for us forever—the black thought has troubled me—“Surely this is too high a privilege for such an insect of a day as this poor creature, man.”

Mary did not look at this matter unbelievably—although she appreciated the greatness of the favor—she did but rejoice the more heartily on that account. “For He that is mighty has done to me great things.” Come, Soul, it is a great thing to be a child of God, and your God does great wonders—therefore be not staggered through unbelief—but triumph in your adoption, great mercy though it is. Oh, it is a mighty mercy, higher than the mountains, to be chosen of God from all eternity, but it is true that even so are His redeemed chosen and therefore sing of it!

It is a deep and unspeakable blessing to be redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, but you are so redeemed beyond all question. Therefore doubt not, but shout aloud for gladness of heart! It is a rapturous thought that you shall dwell above and wear the crown and wave the palm branch forever. Let no mistrust interrupt the melody of your Psalm of expectation, but—

*“Loud to the praise of love Divine,
Bid every string awake.”*

What a fullness of the Truth of God is there in these few words—“He that is mighty has done to me great things.” It is a text from which a glorified spirit in Heaven might preach an endless sermon!

I pray you, lay hold upon the thoughts which I have in this poor way suggested to you and try to reach where Mary stood in holy exultation. The Grace is great, but so is its Giver. The love is infinite, but so is the heart from which it wells up. The blessedness is unspeakable, but so is the Divine Wisdom which planned it from of old. Let our hearts take up the Virgin’s Magnificat and praise the Lord right joyously at this hour.

Still further, for we have not exhausted the strain, the holiness of God has sometimes dampened the ardor of the Believer’s joy. But not so in Mary’s case. She exults in it—“And holy is His name.” She weaves even that bright attribute into her song. Holy Lord! When I forget my Savior, the thought of Your purity makes me shudder! Standing where Moses stood upon the holy mountain of Your law, I do exceedingly fear and quake. To me, conscious of my guilt, no thunder could be more dreadful than the seraph’s hymn of, “Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth.” What is Your holiness but a consuming fire which must utterly destroy me—a sinner?

If the heavens are not pure in Your sight and You charged your angels with folly, how much less, then, can You bear with vain, rebellious man that is born of woman? How can man be pure and how can Your eyes look upon him without consuming him quickly in Your anger? But, O Holy One of Israel, when my spirit can stand on Calvary and see Your holiness vindicate itself in the wounds of the Man who was born at Bethlehem, then my spirit rejoices in that glorious holiness which was once her terror!

Did the thrice holy God stoop down to man and take man’s flesh? Then there is hope, indeed! Did a holy God bear the sentence which His own Law pronounced on man? Does that holy God Incarnate now spread His wounded hands and plead for me? Then, my Soul, the holiness of God shall be a consolation to you. Living waters from this sacred well I draw. And I will add to all my notes of joy this one, “and holy is His name.” He has sworn by His holiness and He will not lie. He will keep His Covenant with His Anointed and His seed forever.

When we take to ourselves the wings of eagles and mount towards Heaven in holy praise, the prospect widens beneath us—even so as Mary poises herself upon the poetic wings, she looks down the long aisles of the past and beholds the mighty acts of Jehovah in the ages long back. Mark how her strain gathers majesty. It is rather the sustained flight of the eagle-winged Ezekiel, than the flutter of the timid dove of Nazareth.

She sings, “His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.” She looks beyond the captivity to the days of the kings—to Solomon, to David—along through the Judges into the wilderness, across the Red Sea to Jacob, to Isaac, to Abraham and onward, till, pausing at the gate of Eden, she hears the sound of the promise, “The Seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” How magnificently she sums up the book of the wars of the Lord and rehearses the triumphs of Jehovah, “He has showed strength with His arm. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.”

How delightfully is mercy intermingled with judgment in the next canto of her Psalm—“He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent empty away.” My Brothers and Sisters, let us, too, sing of the past, glorious in faithfulness, fearful in judgment, teeming with wonders! Our own lives shall furnish us with a hymn of adoration. Let us speak of the things which we have made touching the King.

We were hungry and He filled us with good things. We crouched upon the dunghill with the beggar and He has enthroned us among princes. We have been tossed with tempest, but with the Eternal Pilot at the helm, we have known no fear of shipwreck. We have been cast into the burning fiery furnace, but the Presence of the Son of Man has quenched the violence of the flames. Proclaim to all, O you daughters of music, the long tale of the mercy of the Lord to His people in the generations long departed!

Many waters could not quench His love, neither could the floods drown it! Persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—none of these have separated the saints from the love of God which is in Christ our Lord. The saints beneath the wings of the Most High have been ever safe! When most molested by the enemy they have dwelt in perfect peace—“God is their refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Plowing at times the blood red wave, the ship of the Church has never swerved from her predestined path of progress. Every tempest has favored her—the hurricane which sought her ruin has been made to bear her the more swiftly onward. Her flag has braved, these 1800 years, the battle and the breeze and she fears not what may yet be before her. But, lo, she nears the haven! The day is dawning when she shall bid farewell to storms. The waves already grow calm beneath her. The long-promised rest is near at hand—her Jesus Himself meets her—walking upon the waters!

She shall enter into her eternal haven and all who are on board shall, with their Captain, sing of joy and triumph and victory through Him who has loved her and been her Deliverer! When Mary thus tuned her heart to glory in her God for His wonders in the past, she particularly dwelt upon the note of election. The highest note in the scale of my praise is reached when my soul sings, “I love Him because He first loved me.” Well does Kent put it—

*“A monument of Grace,
A sinner saved by blood.
The streams of love I trace,
Up to the fountain, God.
And in His mighty breast I see,
Eternal thoughts of love to me.”*

We can scarcely fly higher than the source of love in the mount of God. Mary has the doctrine of election in her song—"He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things. And the rich He has sent empty away." Here is distinguishing Grace, discriminating regard! Here are some suffered to perish! Here are others, the least deserving and the most obscure, made the special objects of Divine affection! Do not be afraid to dwell upon this high doctrine, Beloved in the Lord. Let me assure you that when your mind is most heavy and depressed you will find this to be a bottle of richest cordial.

Those who doubt these doctrines, or who cast them into the cold shade, miss the richest clusters of Eshcol. They lose the wines on the lees well refined, the fat things full of marrow. But you who by reason of years have had your senses exercised to discern between good and evil—you know that there is no honey like this—no sweetness comparable to it! If the honey in Jonathan's woods when but touched, enlightened the eyes to see, this is honey that will enlighten your heart to love and learn the mysteries of the kingdom of God!

Eat and fear not overindulgence! Live upon this choice dainty and fear not that you shall grow weary of it for the more you know, the more you will want to know. The more your soul is filled, the more you will desire to have your mind enlarged that you may comprehend more and more the eternal, everlasting, discriminating love of God!

But one more remark upon this point. You perceive she does not finish her song till she has reached the Covenant. When you mount as high as election, tarry on its sister mount, the Covenant of Grace. In the last verse of her song, she sings, "As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." To her, that was the Covenant. To us who have clearer light, the ancient Covenant made in the council chamber of eternity is the subject of the greatest delight. The Covenant with Abraham was in its best sense only a minor copy of that gracious Covenant made with Jesus, the Everlasting Father of the faithful, before the blue heavens were stretched abroad.

Covenant engagements are the softest pillows for an aching head. Covenant engagements with the Surety, Christ Jesus, are the best props for a trembling spirit!—

*"His oath, His Covenant, His blood,
Support me in the raging flood.
When every earthly prop gives way,
This still is all my strength and stay."*

If Christ did swear to bring me to Glory and if the Father swore that He would give me to the Son to be a part of the infinite reward for the travail of His soul, then, my Soul, till God Himself shall be unfaithful, till Christ shall cease to be the Truth, till God's eternal council shall become a lie and the red roll of His election shall be consumed with fire, you are safe! Rest, then, in perfect peace, come what will! Take your harp from the willows and never let your fingers cease to sweep it to strains of richest harmony. O for Grace from first to last to join the Virgin in her song!

II. Secondly, SHE SINGS SWEETLY. She praises her God right heartily. Observe how she plunges into the midst of the subject. There is no preface, but "My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." When some people sing, they appear to be afraid of being heard. Our poet puts it—

*"With all my powers of heart and tongue
I'll praise my Maker in my song.
Angels shall hear the notes I raise,
Approve the song and join the praise."*

I am afraid angels frequently do not hear those poor, feeble, dying whispers which often drop from our lips merely by force of custom.

Mary is all heart! Evidently her soul is on fire! While she muses, the fire burns. Then she speaks with her tongue. May we, too, call home our wandering thoughts and wake up our slumbering powers to praise redeeming love. It is a noble word that she uses here—"My soul does magnify the Lord." I suppose it means, "My soul does endeavor to make God great by praising Him." He is as great as He can be in His Being—my goodness cannot extend to Him. But yet my soul would make God greater in the thoughts of others and greater in my own heart.

I would give the train of His Glory a wider sweep. The light which He has given me I would reflect. I would make His enemies His friends. I would turn hard thoughts of God into thoughts of love. "My soul would magnify the Lord." Old Trapp says, "My soul would make greater room for Him." It is as if she wanted to get more of God into her, like Rutherford, when he says, "Oh, that my heart were as big as Heaven, that I might hold Christ in it," and then he stops himself—"But Heaven and earth cannot contain Him. Oh, that I had a heart as big as seven heavens, that I might hold the whole of Christ within it."

Truly this is a larger desire than we can ever hope to have gratified! Yet still our lips shall sing, "My soul does magnify the Lord." Oh, if I could crown Him! If I could lift Him higher! If my burning at the stake would but add a spark more light to His Glory, happy would I be to suffer! If my being crushed would lift Jesus an inch higher, happy were the destruction which should add to His Glory! Such is the hearty spirit of Mary's song!

Again, her praise is very joyful—"My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." The word in the Greek is a remarkable one. I believe it is the same word which is used in the passage, "Rejoice you in that day and leap for joy." We used to have an old word in English which described a certain exulting dance, "a galliard." That word is supposed to have come from the Greek word used here. It was a sort of leaping dance. The old commentators call it a "levalto." Mary, in effect, declares, "My spirit shall dance like David before the ark, shall leap, shall spring, shall hound, shall rejoice in God my Savior."

When we praise God it ought not to be with dolorous and doleful notes. Some of my Brethren praise God always on the minor key, or in the deep, deep bass—they cannot feel holy till they have the horrors. Why cannot some men worship God except with a long face? I know them by their very walk as they come to worship—what a dreary pace it is! How solemnly proper and funereal, indeed! They do not understand David's Psalm—

*"Up to her courts with joys unknown,
The sacred tribes repair."*

No, they come up to their Father's house as if they were going to jail and worship God on Sunday as if it were the most doleful day in the week!

It is said of a certain Highlander, when the Highlanders were very pious, that he once went to Edinburgh and when he came back again he said he had seen a dreadful sight on Sunday—he had seen people at Edinburgh going to Church with happy faces! He thought it wicked to look happy on Sunday—and that same notion exists in the minds of certain good people hereabouts. They fancy that when the saints get together they should sit down and have a little comfortable misery but little delight.

In truth, moaning and pining is not the appointed way for worshipping God. We should take Mary as a pattern. All the year round I recommend her as an example to fainthearted and troubled ones. "My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." Cease from rejoicing in sensual things and with sinful pleasures have no fellowship—for all such rejoicing is evil—but you cannot rejoice too much in the Lord! I believe that the fault with our public worship is that we are too sober, too cold, too

formal. I do not exactly admire the ravings of our Primitive-Methodist friends when they grow wild. But I should have no objection to hear a hearty, "Hallelujah! "now and then.

An enthusiastic burst of exultation might warm our hearts. The shout of "Glory!" might fire our spirits. This I know—I never feel more ready for true worship than when I am preaching in Wales—when the throughout whole sermon, the preacher is aided rather than interrupted by shouts of "Glory to God!" and "Bless His name!" Why, then, one's blood begins to glow and one's soul is stirred up! This is the true way of serving God with joy! "Rejoice in the Lord al

She sings sweetly, in the third place, because she sings confidently. She does not pause while she sings to questions herself, "Have I any right to sing?" but no, "My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden." "If" is a sad enemy to all Christian happiness—"but," "perhaps," "doubt," "surmise," "suspicion"—these are a race of highwaymen who waylay poor timid pilgrims and steal their spending money! Harps soon get out of tune and when the wind blows from the doubting quarter, the strings snap by the wholesale.

If the angels of Heaven could have a doubt, it would turn Heaven into Hell. "If you are the Son of God," was the dastardly weapon wielded by the old enemy against our Lord in the wilderness. Our great foe knows well what weapon is the most dangerous. Christian, put up the shield of faith whenever you see that poisoned dagger about to be used against you!

I fear that some of you foster your doubts and fears. You might as well hatch young vipers and foster the cockatrice. You think that it is a sign of Divine Grace to have doubts, whereas it is a sign of infirmity! It does not prove that you have no Grace when you doubt God's promise, but it does prove that you need more—for if you had more Grace, you would take God's Word as He gives it and it would be said of you as of Abraham, that, "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform."

God help you to shake off your doubts! Oh, these are devilish things! Is that too hard a word? I wish I could find a harder! These are felons. These are rebels, who seek to rob Christ of His Glory. These are traitors who cast mire upon the escutcheon of my Lord. Oh, these are vile traitors—hang them on a gallows, high as Haman's—cast them to the earth and let them rot like carrion, or bury them with the burial of an ass. Abhorred of God are doubts—abhorred of men let them be! They are cruel enemies to your souls! They injure your usefulness, they despoil you in every way. Smite them with the sword of the Lord and of Gideon! By faith in the promise seek to drive out these Canaanites and possess the land. O you men of God, speak with confidence and sing with sacred joy! There is something more than confidence in her song. She sings with great familiarity, "My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He that is mighty has done to me great things. And holy is His name." It is the song of one who draws very near to her God in loving intimacy. I always have an idea, when I listen to the reading of the Liturgy, that it is a slave's worship. I do not find fault with its words or sentences, perhaps of all human compositions the Liturgical service of the Church of England is, with some exceptions, the noblest.

But it is only fit for slaves, or at the best for subjects. The whole service through one feels that there is a boundary set round about the mountain, just as at Sinai. Its Litany is the wail of a sinner and not the happy triumph of a saint! The service genders unto bondage and has nothing in it of the confident spirit of adoption. It views the Lord afar off, as One to be feared rather than loved and to be dreaded rather than delighted in. I have no doubt it suits those whose experience leads them to put the Ten Commandments near the communion table for they hereby evidence that their dealings with God are still on the terms of servants and not of sons.

For my own part I want a form of worship in which I may draw near to my God and come even to His feet, spreading my case before Him and ordering my cause with arguments—talking with Him as a friend talks with his friend, or a child with its father—otherwise the worship is of little worth to me. Our Episcopalian friends, when they come here, are naturally struck with our service as being irreverent because it is so much more familiar and bold than theirs. Let us carefully guard

against really deserving such a criticism and then we need not fear it. A renewed soul yearns after that very communion which the formalist calls irreverent!

To talk with God as my Father—to deal with Him as with one whose promises are true to me and to whom I, a sinner washed in blood and clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ may come with boldness, not standing afar off—I say this is a thing which the outer-court worshipper cannot understand. There are some of our hymns which speak of Christ with such familiarity that the cold critic says, “I do not like such expressions, I could not sing them.” I quite agree with you, Sir Critic, that the language would not befit you, a stranger.

But a child may say a thousand things which a servant must not. I remember a minister altering one of our hymns—

*“Let those refuse to sing
Who never knew our God.
But favorites of the heavenly King
May speak their joys abroad.”*

He sung it—“But subjects of the heavenly King.” Yes. And when he sang it, I thought, “That is right. You are singing what you feel—you know nothing of discriminating Grace and special manifestations and therefore you keep to your native level, “subjects of the heavenly King.” But oh, my heart wants a worship in which I can feel and express the feeling that I am a favorite of the heavenly king and therefore can sing His special love, His manifested favor, His sweet relationships, His mysterious union with my soul!

You never get right till you ask the question, “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself unto us and not unto the world?” There is a secret which is revealed to us and not to the outside world—an understanding which the sheep receive and not the goats. I appeal to any of you who during the week are in an official position—a judge, for instance. You have a seat on the bench and you wear no small dignity when you are there. When you get home there is a little fellow who has very little fear of Your Judgeship, but much love for your person! He climbs your knee. He kisses your cheek and says a thousand things to you which are meet and right enough as they come from him—but which you would not tolerate in court from any living man.

The parable needs no interpretation. When I read some of the prayers of Martin Luther they shock me, but I argue with myself thus—“It is true I cannot talk to God in the same way as Martin, but then perhaps Martin Luther felt and realized his adoption more than I do and therefore was not less humble because he was more bold. It may be that he used expressions which would be out of place in the mouth of any man who had not known the Lord as he had.”

Oh my Friends, sing this day of our Lord Jesus as One near to us! Get close to Christ! Read His wounds! Thrust your hand into His side! Put your finger into the print of the nails and then your song shall win a sacred softness and melody not to be gained elsewhere. I must close by observing that while her song was all this, yet how very humble it was and how full of gratitude. The Papist calls her, “Mother of God,” but she never whispers such a thing in her song. No, it is “God my Savior,” just such words as the sinner who is speaking to you might use, and such expressions as you sinners who are hearing me can use, too.

She needs a Savior. She feels it. Her soul rejoices because there is a Savior for her. She does not talk as though she could commend herself to Him, but she hopes to stand accepted in the Beloved. Let us, then, take care that our familiarity has always blended with it the lowliest prostration of spirit when we remember that He is God over all, blessed forever and we are nothing but dust and ashes! He fills all things and we are less than nothing and vanity.

III. The last thing was to be SHALL SHE SING ALONE? Yes, she must, if the only music we can bring is that of carnal delights and worldly pleasures. There will be much music tomorrow which

would not chime in with hers. There will be much mirth tomorrow and much laughter and I am afraid the most of it would not accord with Mary's song. It will not be, "My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."

We would not stop the play of the animal spirits in young or old. We would not abate one jot of your relish of the mercies of God, so long as you break not His command by wantonness, or drunkenness, or excess—but still, when you have had the most of this bodily exercise, it profits little—it is only the joy of the fleeting hour and not the happiness of the spirit which abides. And therefore Mary must sing alone, as far as you are concerned.

The joy of the table is too low for Mary. The joy of the feast and the family grovels when compared with hers, but shall she sing alone? Certainly not, if this day any of us by simple trust in Jesus can take Christ to be our own! Does the Spirit of God this day lead you to say, "I trust my soul on Jesus?" My dear Friend, then you have conceived Christ—after the mystical and best sense of that word—Christ Jesus is conceived in your soul! Do you understand Him as the Sin-Bearer, taking away transgression? Can you see Him bleeding as the Substitute for men?

Do you accept Him as such? Does your faith put all her dependence upon what He did, upon what He is, upon what He does? Then Christ is conceived in you and you may go your way with all the joy that Mary knew! And I was half ready to say, with something more—for the natural conception of the Savior's holy body was not one-tenth so meet a theme for congratulation as the spiritual conception of the holy Jesus within your heart when He shall be in you the Hope of Glory.

My dear Friend, if Christ is yours, there is no song on earth too high or too holy for you to sing! No, there is no song which thrills from angelic lips, no note which thrills Archangel's tongues in which you may not join! Even this day the holiest, the happiest, the most glorious of words and thoughts and emotions belong to you. Use them! God help you to enjoy them. And His be the praise, while yours is the comfort evermore. Amen.