

THE CHRISTIAN:

AN ELEGY

IN THREE PARTS

BY

Rev. Dr. JOHN MACDONALD,

OF

FERINTOSH.

TRANSLATED BY JOHN MACLEOD.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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PART I.

The Christian on his Way to Jordan.

(A Homely Translation.)

Well I knew—and yet remember—in the morning of my days
Men of faith that, true and tender, ran the Christian's daily race ;
Willing that the crown should on the Captain of salvation rest,
They would ne'er divide His honour nor refuse their Lord's behest.

And among that blessed number who were faithful in their time
There was one that I would mention by himself in this my rhyme ;
Well it were my part and willing am I to declare his praise,
For he was my earthly father and my stay in childhood days.

Mercy great the Lord showed to him in the days of early youth,
For a glorious birth from heaven gave him then to know the truth ;
And the Holy Ghost was given him ere his summers were a score,
As the seal and stamp of heaven that he ne'er might forfeit more.

Striking were his gifts of nature, vigorous his powers of mind,
But with all their vigour it was grace that blessed them to his kind ;
Grace it was that hewed and shaped them and that drew his thoughts
above,
And as water on the mill-wheel made the inner wheels to move.

Many make their boast of talents and of native force of thought,
But alas! what is their value where the living breath is not?
Even as the bones are seen when scattered in the vale of death,
Not more life the greatest of them than the least among them hath.

But let once the kindly breath come from the four winds of the sky,
Then behold! the scattered bones shall each unto the other fly;
And at once they rise an army, every one a living soul,
Even so are gifts of nature when the Spirit maketh whole.

But the Lord gave him the unction, unction pure of grace in Christ,
Tho' the measure was unreckoned nought was from the fulness missed;
Day by day this precious unction as the dew from heaven came,
And full often double measure when he called upon the Name.

Every day and each day often did he bend his knees in prayer
At the throne of grace, and often found he consolation there;
For to him the mind was given that kept him watchful near the throne,
Well remember I how oft he knelt on moor and hillside lone.

But it was the fragrant unction that was his in measure rich
That gave him his meek contrition and his sweet refreshing speech;
And it gave him for each duty, as it came, a pointed word,
And in Christ's own cause it made him steadfast ever to his Lord.

Over all things in the office of imparting Scripture truth
Was he diligent, unwearied, faithful both to age and youth;
Never was he stiff or tedious as he spoke and others heard,
Hard indeed it was to slumber when he spoke the living word.

He was active in his duty when he questioned young or old,
As with wise and sound instruction he the scheme of truth unrolled;
It was not his wont to puzzle folk with questions hard or high,
But to bring before them saving truth that they might profit by.

His was too the rare endowment that 'tis right for me to name,
All his thoughts were clear and ordered, and he well could utter them;
Neat and choice was he in wording every thought that he expressed,
And—what neat words often fail in—his were solid wisdom dressed.

Ever cheery as a Christian, whatso'er his case might be
When before his fellow-creatures no one might his sadness see;
For he ever held it duty to commend Messiah's praise,
And to show the life from heaven in its loveliness and grace.

Often to his friends he told how he had sought it from on high,
That his face should still be cheerful tho' his heart was hard and dry;
And full many might bear witness as he sought that so he found,
And this doubtless in the vineyard made him useful all around.

Small esteem he ever had for crafty gloominess of face,
And for hollow heartless sighing and for mere devout grimace;
But the fragrant breath distinguish well could he from all deceit,
And where'er he found contrition ever drew he near to it.

Clear and keen was his discernment of the saving work of faith,
Well he knew the deep distinction separating life from death;
Yet his wish was to be kindly when he judged another's state,
And to leave the last decision till the judgment shall be set.

Never did he care to winnow with a wind that drove along,
Lest its sudden gusts should sweep the precious wheat the chaff among;
Rather far he thought it safe that chaff be left among the grain
Than the smallest corn of wheat should with the worthless chaff remain.

And as for the life that's hidden his was one of faith indeed,
Not at all on sight or feelings did his living spirit feed;
'Twas on Christ as brought before him in the faithful word of God
That his confidence was founded, not on any grace bestowed.

Ever sought he, as his word was, living feelings, fresh and good,
 But that he should live on feelings ! they could never serve as food ;
 Yet when faith had fresh enjoyment then the flesh was stricken sore,
 Sense and feelings had abundance and the cup was running o'er.

But he had the faith that's given by the Spirit of the Lord,
 And that cleaveth fast to Jesus on the warrant of His word,
 That with emptiness forth goeth whatso'er may bar its way,
 And that never turneth homeward save with something good to say.

Yes, that living faith and precious of the fathers of the past
 That held out against temptation and continued to the last,
 That would take nor voice nor vision for the true and living word.
 But that resting in its record found communion with the Lord.

'Twas this faith that came unto him through the Saviour and His death
 That o'ercame corruption guilt and all temptations from beneath ;
 That with courage stout resisted every thrust and every stroke,
 And each wind and tempest ever that upon his spirit broke.

Unbelief as he'd acknowledge often came to pay him court,
 Yet he neither made him welcome nor received his false report ;
 But before the lying prophet he the witnessed promise brought,
 Then, behold ! at once the coward put to silence answered nought.

Thus through faith he journeyed onward—steady, peaceful, earnest,
 true—

Watchful over words and motives, calm in all he had to do ;
 So his inward life and outward was communion with the Head,
 Christ's own people loved him dearly, and their love with love he paid.

Never left he out of sight that from the world he'd soon remove
 As a pilgrim like his fathers and his homeland was above ;
 That his days were passing swiftly and his end would surely come,
 And that he must now make ready for his everlasting home.

Though his years on earth were many, five they wanted of five score,
Never through their long duration had his strength given way before ;
As the time of separation and his journey's end drew on,
Fast for heaven his spirit ripened, willing eager to be gone.

Since the Lord in mercy met him all along He showed the same
Kindness in the preservation of his powers and his name ;
As a brightly shining candle burning with a steady ray,
So was he with no obscuring till his spirit passed away.

PART II.

The Christian on the Banks of Jordan.

I am on the brink of Jordan; backward shrinks this mortal frame;
Well 'twere now for me to have the hope that ne'er shall put to shame;
Yes, the hope the fathers cherished on the Rock of Ages placed;
By it homeward they've been safely brought to Canaan's land of rest.

'Twas their hope and living faith that led them to confess on earth,
That they were unwelcome strangers in the world that gave them birth;
For they sought a better country and a heritage divine,
And with joyful soul they saw from off the hills its glory shine.

Little wonder though the flesh should tremble as it nears the shore
Of the Jordan while the darkness groweth lonesome more and more;
For before me is the ocean without bank or further side,
Everlasting and unmeasured by the sun or flowing tide.

Close the tie is and mysterious that has ever bound in one
Soul and body: yes, the knot is one that's hard to be undone.
But the time will come when death shall loosen it, and then the tomb
Shall its share have; for the tenant leaves behind his earthy home.

Through the remnant of corruption that still cleaveth fast to me
Oftentimes it is my grief how slow my progress seems to be.
What to-day my fear is chiefly, and what tempts me to despond,
Is what's on this side the river more than anything beyond.

But my hope is in the Saviour, who was gracious all the way,
And who led me through the desert, that He'll leave me not to-day ;
That He'll give His promised presence in the midst of conflict sore ;
That He'll part for me the waters, and in triumph bring me o'er.

'Tis in Him that all my trust is, who hath on the hard-fought field
Met with bloody foes and mighty, and hath made them all to yield.
He hath won his fight with Satan, and with sin, and death, and tomb
And for all his ransomed people hath exhausted wrath and doom.

All the claims of Justice He hath satisfied, and paid the debt
That the holy law was pressing me to pay : 'tis fully met,
For He hath secured redemption, to the glory of His grace,
And hath cried aloud, 'Tis finished ; here's my strength and
hiding-place.

What the Saviour thus hath done and suffered in His people's place
Is alone my one foundation, and not any given grace:
This my shelter is and refuge as I go to death and grave,
This will safely bring me home where vision of the Lamb I'll have.

Oh ! but can so vile a creature, one of nature so unclean,
E'er expect to reach the presence, glorious in its spotless sheen ?
Yes, the precious blood of Jesus will my filthiness remove,
And I yet shall reach the palace where's the fulness of His love.

Hard the ills of age assail me, withered now my wonted hue,
All my strength is passing from me, every power fades from view,
For the web is almost ready, and the shuttle swiftly flies,
And this feeble mortal body at death's very portal lies.

But a heart that's hard and wicked, and a wretched carnal frame,
And remorseless unbelief are still my sorrow and my shame.
Unbelief, above all evils, presseth sorely with its load,
Desolates my very spirit, grieves the Blessed Son of God.

'Tis the evil that hath made me fruitless in the vine of grace,
And before my own Beloved it hath marred both form and face ;
It hath made my journey weary, and my step each day but slow ;
And my fear is at the year's end that I wither more than grow.

'Tis my mind, and I'll express it, touching living faith, where'er
It hath been of heaven begotten, unbelief pursues it there.
And each one that hath not felt it as his burden and his woe
Say he what he may about it all his faith is but in show.

'Tis a mystery from the highest seen in every child of grace ;
While his person hath found favour sin hath in his soul a place.
And though 'tis with shame he owns it oftentimes it is his fear,
That instead of growing weaker sin seems stronger year by year.

But 'tis proof beyond denial of the victory of grace,
When the principle of evil groweth burdensome apace.
And this well may show how precious is the grace in Jesus stored,
And may ripen heirs of life for full fruition of their Lord.

Ah ! my heart is full of pity for full many that profess
Jesus' name and have not come to know their own heart's bitterness.
Neither guilt nor yet the body of this death doth cause them groan ;
Satan leaves them free from trouble for he counts them still his own.

Dreadful is the gross deception under which right many lie,
Sleeping in a bare profession as they journey on to die.
Fearless of the eternal ocean that shall soon about them roll,
They shall weeping have and anguish for their never dying soul.

But I'd give them timely counsel ere their heads are laid in dust,
 That with haste they should betake them to the King in humble trust.
 And I would beseech as many such as knew me all my day,
 That with Jesus Christ the Saviour they would close without delay.

I would say, and would bear witness, touching Jesus and His grace,
 That He is the best of Masters, full of love and tenderness ;
 That He's merciful and gentle, and abundant in His love,
 And each one that trusteth in Him, yet shall live with Him above.

Earnest counsel would I offer to the race that's rising now,
 While they have the priceless blessing of a youthful heart aglow,
 While their will is yet unhardened, and they've time to seek for grace,
 And their knees can still with ease be bent to seek the Saviour's face,

That they'd seek the saving knowledge of redemption by the Lord,
 Then He'd be to them a Husband, and they'd taste His loving word.
 For the time of youth for seeking in His service to engage
 Is so sweet that one month of it better is than years of age.

Wretched is the state of old men who have wasted all their days
 O that they would fly to Jesus ere they lose the sunset rays !
 For I shudder to express how dreadful hopeless it must prove
 That old age and death and darkness should their candlestick remove.

'Tis a blessing I'd acknowledge giv'n me by the Lord of light,
 That in wondrous ways my secret sins have hidden been from sight ;
 That He suffered in His favour me to tell His mercy's fame,
 While my faults I laid before Him, others heard me own His name.

And as for this world's provision, He hath shown me kindness great,
 For I have had food and raiment, though I've not had wealth or state,
 As my bread He ordered for me in His mercy day by day,
 More on hope He still upheld me than on aught I stored away.

Men I've seen that were full busy toiling hard in very deed,
Storing wealth with stern endeavour for themselves and for their seed.
But I've seen their worldly riches melted as the summer snows,
And I praised the guardian kindness that ne'er gave me wealth to lose.

Those that won my heart's affection, yes, the brethren of my love,
Who came with me through the desert now have reached their home
above.

This has left me sad and dreary as a bird that's all alone,
Mateless now my poor heart flutters after them where they have gone.

Yes, it flutters, and I would be with the Saviour at rest,
And my soul's desire spreads wing for heaven as my happy nest.
But the load of guilt that hangeth as a weight upon my wing
Checks my flight and brings me down to earth a puny, helpless thing.

But let me abide the Lord's time, His the time that's best of all,
And submissive to His pleasure let me be whate'er befall ;
When the time shall come that He hath in His purpose fixed for me,
Then behold me over Jordan, all the glory His shall be.

Then I leave behind temptation, danger too of wind and sea,
Weakness, guilt, and all corruption, mourning, gloom, and pain shall
flee.

Then I'll be within the palace, where mine eyes shall see His face,
And in fellowship unbroken I shall sing the praise of grace.



PART III.

The Christian Across Jordan.

Now, the Christian, whose complaint was sad corruption cleaving fast
Unto him throughout his course, hath reached his journey's end at last ;
He has now come to the rest that was before him all his days,
And his ransomed soul surroundeth heaven's throne with endless
praise,

But it is not ours to utter what he met with on the shore,
When his spirit was departing from the world and passing o'er ;
Or the greatness and the glory of his bliss within the veil,
And though ours it were to utter, power of utterance would fail.

But let us indeed believe it on the witness of the Lord,
Should he now return that he would speak according to the word ;
And though from the land of perfect peace he cometh nevermore,
Yet methinks I hear him speaking thus from off th' eternal shore.

Glory to the King Almighty, I am safe on Canaan's strand,
For a glorious passage He hath given me to the better land,
Yes, the waters He hath parted that were oft before mine eyes,
And that oft-times made me tremble as I ran to reach the prize.

But how have I e'er been able darksome mountain heights to scale,
Or how have my feet upheld me without stumbling in the valé ?
How I've reached my home I cannot tell, for it cannot be told.
But my ever gentle Saviour never loosed his friendly hold.

Scarce had earth and all its glitter from my fading vision fled,
When at once came forth to meet me Christ my ever blessed Head ;
And before His gracious presence all my terror sped away,
All the clouds and mist and darkness that had e'er obscured my day.

Precious views my soul had of Him as I journeyed on to death,
Views that by His blessing let me know the fragrance of His breath ;
But as for the glorious vision it was altogether new,
For the sun itself was darkness when His presence came in view.

Truly blessed are the people while on earth they run their race,
Who have learned the saving knowledge of His person and His grace ;
That it is that will prepare them for their meeting with the Lord,
And without it no one passeth by the fiery flaming sword.

To eternity from time the passage was exceeding fast,
Of a truth I did not feel as though an instant e'en had passed ;
For the breath so short and feeble had but left my mortal frame,
When at once my Captain held me and my soul had crossed the stream.

Dreadful once to me was Jordan river and my spirit sank,
Ah ! the sight might well unman me as I viewed it from the bank ;
But before my Priest and Saviour all its waters fled apace,
And the pains of death that frayed me issued soon in my release.

But it is a dreadful river to the wretch that's void of grace,
Let him only touch its margin, quick it sweeps him from his place ;
And this yet shall be his anguish that he did not in his day
Lay to heart that drowning waters take the Christless soul away.

Woeful is the plight of sinners unprepared their end to face,
Aliens from Christ, unlike Him, heedless of their ruined case ;
Hastening on to the hereafter, all unsheltered by the blood,
To receive their due deservings, everlasting wrath from God.

But I now am over Jordan and the flesh is left behind,
That full often was my torment and that filled with shame my mind ;
Oftentimes it was my grief, and oft the bitter tear was shed,
All the way it marred my vision and communion with the Head.

'Tis no little peace and blessing from its burden to be free,
For with it has gone each trouble that was ever pressing me ;
When I parted with corruption then each woe and sorrow passed,
Every ill and every weakness, and the tempter fled at last.

And with safety I have come to Canaan's land of rest above,
Where, the desert journey over, dwell the brethren of my love,
Where the Saviour is who loved me with a love beyond compare,
Sight of Him is satisfaction such as tongue cannot declare.

But the blessings of the land how can I ever tell them o'er ?
For 'tis full to overflowing with its milk and honey store ;
And the Lord's own kindly eye is on it all throughout the year,
And the folk that live therein are satisfied with endless cheer.

Its inhabitant shall never say that he is sick or sore,
Ne'er complain of desolation or of famine on its shore ;
And the more his heart of evil wearied him his whole life long,
Now the greater is his gladness and the louder is his song.

Loud he'll join with all the ransomed in their song of praise to God,
Who from everlasting loved them and eternal life bestowed ;
They shall never more by Babel's waters sit with harp unstrung,
But will join in song of triumph, tuneful harp, unfaltering tongue.

Oh ! that those that yet are dwelling in the vale of tears but knew
How engaging is the glory that is hidden from their view,
It would loosen their affections from the world of hollow show,
And would purify their practice, quicken heart and action too.

Then 'twere easy sin to hate and to the Saviour love to yield,
And to stand against the tempter and be manful on the field ;
It would shame their unbelief and every fear on every hand,
And they never would lose sight of Canaan's rest and promised land.

But this would enable them to bear their witness free and plain,
Touching every public evil, and to speak for God to men ;
It would make them conscientious in each thing they had to do,
And would bind them up for ever each to other fast and true.

Many are the points on which they differ while they are on earth,
For as yet they are but children and their judgment little worth ;
Yet when they have grown to manhood it will be no longer so,
And they'll see how vain the things were that had parted them below.

But let them in near communion walk as children of the day,
Drawing from the wells the Lamb hath opened for them by the way ;
Let them eat to satisfaction of the living bread and sweet,
And 'twere no mistake to say that then their heart outruns their feet.

And tho' thirst, fatigue and hunger vex them on their homeward way,
Yet when they shall reach the palace He shall wipe their tears away ;
They shall never more remember all the sufferings they bore,
For their Father, treasured for them, hath abundance laid in store.

My desire is now accomplished, all I wish is fully mine,
And with holiness made lovely like my Saviour I shine ;
I am satisfied with glory, near to God unveiled I move,
And I'll spend eternal ages in the ocean of His love.

Though 'tis true that sense of want can never reach this palace home,
Still I have not yet the fulness while my dust is in the tomb ;
But mine eye with joy looks forward to the happy day to come,
When my body shall partake of perfect glory with the Lamb.

But what eye hath ever seen it ? or what ear hath ever heard
All the greatness and the glory God hath for His own prepared ?
They are blessed and they are happy who have learned Messiah's name,
For in Him their bliss unbroken shall for ever be the same,

