

THE PASSION-HYMNS OF ICELAND

by Charles Venn Pilcher

A collection of spiritually rich verses and hymns for worship and reflection.

21 Chapters

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The Passion-Hymns of Iceland

PREFACE

This book represents what is, I believe, practically a pioneer attempt to do some such work in the field of Icelandic Hymnology as that already done so admirably in the Latin, Greek, and German fields. Icelandic sacred song is worthy of study, as well for its own sake, as because it is the flower of the spiritual life of a people and of a church so nearly akin to our own, and yet situated in such a different environment. The closeness of this relationship is not often realized. Iceland was largely colonized by Norse settlers from our islands as well as from Norway. Even the Celtic element was not absent from the blood of the new nation. The greatest of Icelandic Sagas, Njáls Saga, is simply "Neil's Saga." And the Icelandic language itself, so unintelligible to us now, was spoken over half England a thousand years ago by the Norsemen, spoken, too, by some of our Kings. It is our language that has changed, not theirs. The modern Icelander still speaks what is practically the tongue of the Sagas.

The Icelandic Church may claim our interest, as one of those Lutheran Churches which possess the allegiance of so large a part of the Teutonic Race, Churches closely connected with our own Royal Family, Churches whose history, at the period of the Reformation, was entwined with that of the Church of England.

But while the Icelandic people are thus closely related to ourselves, under what vastly differing conditions have they passed the thousand and odd years of their national life! Inhabiting "Ultima Thule" itself (a land containing some of the wildest and weirdest scenery on the globe), speaking the most northern of civilized languages, and forming the far-flung outpost of Europe to the north-west, this people have

braved the rigours of a sub-arctic climate, and survived the loneliness of isolation, the wasting of famine, the violence of volcanic action.

The life of such a people has an interest of its own to all. The hymnologist asks, "What type of sacred song did such a life develop?"

The story of the hymns of Iceland centres largely round two names, that of Hallgrim Petursson in the seventeenth century, and that of Bishop Valdimar Briem at the present day. Not that either of these singers stands alone, but each towers above his contemporaries in the domain of sacred song, as Mont Blanc over the neighbouring Aiguilles. The majority of the present translations are made from the hymns of these two writers.

I hope that the translations from Hallgrim Petursson will give some idea of his peculiar power. I have chosen passages which illustrate his method of drawing comfort from special incidents of our Lord's Passion, passages which illustrate the prayers with which his hymns abound (prayers which have a wonderful power of haunting the memory), and also one passage which will give an example of his bursts of praise--a stanza often sung by itself in Iceland as a doxology.

From the hymns of Bishop Valdimar Briem I have chosen those which seem to me interesting by their originality, or by their fulness of reference to Nature, although a selection made on such a principle will scarcely represent the ordinary devotional simplicity of Icelandic hymns.

I have closed this collection with a translation of the hymn written by Matthías Jochumsson on the occasion of the thousandth anniversary of the landing of the first settlers--an occasion marked by the gift to the island of the privilege of "Home Rule" from the King of Denmark.

The hymn well mirrors the feelings of the people emerging from a period of struggle and isolation into the dawning brightness of a freer and a

wider life.

I am aware that my translations may appear to Icelandic eyes somewhat too paraphrastic, at least in certain parts. But I venture to think that, upon the whole, this is inevitable. I have always tried to make as good an English hymn as I could, and to do this the Icelandic original must at times be treated with some freedom. The reasons for this English scholars of Icelandic will understand. The great majority of the translations are in the same, or very nearly the same, metres as their prototypes.

Only portions of the long hymns of Hallgrim Petursson have been translated. This is true also of some of the other hymns.

As to the anglicizing of Icelandic names, I have used my judgment in each case.

I should like to suggest Gounod's tune, "Redemption," as suitable to the "Easter Hymn"; Barnby's tune, "St. Sylvester," for "The Divine Guest"; and the old chorale, "Attolle Paulum," for the two stanzas on "Our Lord's Cry from the Cross." The "Whitsuntide Hymn" goes well to a Danish tune by Bergreen, one of the few modern tunes in the Icelandic Hymn Book which really please English ears.

I should like to call particular attention to the longer translations from Hallgrim Petursson, especially to the Hymn on the Stream from Our Lord's Wounded Side, as representing some of his best work. From the Hymns of Bishop Valdimar Briem, I would select, in addition to those already mentioned, "The Voices of Creation," "The Good Shepherd," and "Labourers in the Vineyard."

I have used the eleventh edition of the Icelandic Sálmabók," and the edition of the "Passíusálmar," edited by Jónas Jónsson in 1907. The whole of these books I have gone over, as well as the hymns of the Icelandic Sunday School Hymn Book, published in Winnipeg, choosing

those hymns for translation which made a personal appeal to me. I have also, besides the invaluable dictionaries of Zoëga, made use of Grímur Thomsen's edition of the Works of Hallgrim Petursson; of the article on Hallgrim Petursson appearing in the first number of the Icelandic Paper, Bjarmi; of Matthías Jochumsson's "Ljothmæli"; of Vigfusson and Powell's "Icelandic Prose Reader"; of Annandale's, "The Faroes and Iceland"; and of Collingwood and Stefansson's, "The Saga-steads of Iceland."

I most gladly acknowledge the encouragement and help which I have received from friends, and especially the unfailing kindness of the Rev. Jón Bjarnason, D.D., Pastor of the leading Icelandic Church in Winnipeg. Not only have I gathered much information from various numbers of the Icelandic Church Paper, Sameiningin, of which he is Editor, and received valuable knowledge by correspondence, but I have had the privilege of being his guest at Winnipeg, when he put at my disposal his unique library, as well as his own profound knowledge of Icelandic Literature.

If these translations from the hymns of Iceland are able to draw out the brotherly interest of English-speaking Christians towards that Church and people, whose best spirits are fighting the battle against twentieth-century rationalism and materialism without the encouragement which we derive from our numbers, and without the inspiration of our unique constructive and devotional religious literature, I shall not have worked in vain.

C. VENN PILCHER.

St. James Cathedral,

Toronto,

January 1, 1913.

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THE PASSION-HYMNS OF ICELAND

INTRODUCTION

HALLGRIM PETURSSON

Nearly two hundred and fifty years ago, in a lonely Icelandic farm-house a leper lay dying. Outside the doors of the cottage Nature was lavish in her gifts of beauty. To the west the waters of the Whalefirth widened towards the Greenland Sea and the sunset. To the east they narrowed into a girdle of hill and fell, forming a land-locked bay, scene of exploits told in one of the Sagas of long ago. But within the cottage all was bare and comfortless. The membrane of the primitive window rattled in the autumn wind, while on the wooden locker-bed, built into the wall of the house, amidst the heart-breaking squalor of his disease, the leper lay dying. But look! his lips are moving, and, as we listen, we hear him pour forth in his beautiful language a hymn bright with the deathless hope of Christ's Gospel, glad with the assurance of a speedy release from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. It was the man's swan-song. Not long afterwards, by the quiet hand of death, he gained his heart's desire.

Such must have been, as in imagination we reconstruct the scene from the knowledge at our disposal, the passing of Hallgrim Petursson, the sacred singer of Iceland. It was a notable example of the victory of the spirit over the flesh, of the triumph of the Christian in his hour of deepest physical need. Small wonder that this was the man who out of his poverty left to his countrymen one of the most precious legacies which they have ever received--those Passion-Hymns, which Iceland hearts will cherish, as a poet of their own has said, "as long as the sun shines upon the cold Jokull."

Hallgrim Petursson was born in the year 1614. His youth was cast in one

of the stirring periods of Icelandic history. The breath of the Reformation was breathing upon the dead bones and waking them to life. Odd Gottskalksson had published his Icelandic New Testament in 1540, six years before the death of Luther--a version of which Gudbrand Vigfusson could write: "It is well worthy to stand by the side of that of Tyndal or Luther, and higher praise could hardly be given to it." Bishop Gudbrand of Holar had brought out his complete edition of the Icelandic Bible in 1584, and was issuing hymns and other religious literature from his press. It was in this bracing atmosphere that Hallgrim spent his early years, his father being sexton of the Cathedral at Holar. Here doubtless were sown in the boy's heart those seeds which later were to bear such abundant fruit. But the harvest was not yet. Possibly owing to some youthful indiscretion, the young Hallgrim was sent from the school at Holar to Copenhagen. Here, in the great city, the boy's talents were in imminent danger of being lost. But divine providence was watching over him. Brynjolf Sveinsson, later to become one of the most famous of Icelandic Bishops, found him in a blacksmith's shop, and with quick eye discerning the gold beneath the grime, put him again to school. His education in Copenhagen was continued until an event occurred which was to cast its influence over his whole life. It was in the year 1627, the year of Bishop Gudbrand's death, that four ships from North Africa, three of them being corsairs from Algiers, fell upon the defenceless coast of Iceland. The main attack was delivered upon the Island of Heimaey, the chief of the Westman group. The wanton and inhuman atrocities committed by the pirates so burnt themselves into the memory of the unfortunate inhabitants, that Mr. Nelson Annandale relates that during his six weeks' stay at Heimaey in the year 1898 he heard almost daily of the raid. Between three and four hundred persons were taken

captives chiefly by the Algerians, and sold as slaves in the market at Algiers. Many suffered great cruelty, largely in the form of persecution for their faith. They were "chained in insupportable positions, beaten on the hands and faces, exposed naked in public places, and again beaten until they lost the power of speech." At length, however, an Icelander was allowed to carry a petition to the King of Denmark, asking for 1,200 rix-dollars as a ransom price for the surviving captives. A subscription was raised in Iceland, to which the King of Denmark himself largely contributed. This was paid over in due course, and in 1637, ten years after the raid, thirty-four survivors out of the hundreds taken were set at liberty.

Some of these people broke their homeward journey at Copenhagen, and here it is that Hallgrim Petursson again comes into the story. During their enforced sojourn in North Africa, these survivors seem to have become more or less infected with Mohammedanism, or at least to have let a part of their Christian faith slip away into the limbo of forgetfulness. It was necessary to remedy this state of things, and to do so an Icelander, learned in Christian truth, but resident at Copenhagen, was needed. Hallgrim Petursson, now a distinguished theological student, fulfilled these conditions, and was forthwith appointed by the authorities to be the religious instructor of his rescued compatriots.

Among the captives was a lady, Gudrid by name, who by her beauty had already attracted the attention of the son of the Dey of Algiers. The young prince had even wished to marry her. This, of course, could not be tolerated, and the source of temptation was sent out of the country among the other ransomed slaves. Gudrid thus became a member of the group which was confided to the pastoral care of Hallgrim Petursson. It was perhaps not unnatural that he in his turn should become a captive

to those charms which had already proved too potent for the Algerian Prince. Such was the infatuation of the unfortunate man, that although Gudrid had been a married woman in Iceland before the raid, and although, for all that was known to the contrary, her husband was still living there, Hallgrim determined to leave Copenhagen and to sail back to Iceland with Gudrid. Upon their arrival in that country they remained together, and at length, hearing of the husband's death, were married.

This conduct was the great blot upon Hallgrim's life. He did not go unpunished. The sweet fruit became bitter in his mouth. The Mohammedan leanings of his wife were through long years a pain and grief to his sensitive nature. Nor did his conscience keep silence.

"Lord, I have sown the seed of sin;
Hideous have my transgressions been."

So he sings in one of his Passion-Hymns, and it has been thought that the words bear a special reference to this episode of his career. This sin may have been in a sense the *beata culpa*, which, with its attendant remorse, drove him to the Cross for that gift of pardon and renewal, of which he was afterwards to sing so peerlessly to his countrymen.

Hallgrim Petursson was ordained in 1644 and was in 1650 appointed to the parish of Saurby on the Whalefirth in the south-west of Iceland.

Here he gave himself largely to the exercise of his poetic gift, writing much religious verse; and it was here that, inspired by the example of Paul Gerhardt in Germany and of Kingo in Denmark, he achieved his greatest work in the composition of the immortal Passion-Hymns. They appeared in the year 1659, a first copy of the manuscript being sent to the daughter of that Bishop Brynjolf Sveinsson who had formerly befriended him in Copenhagen. But the singer of Christ's Passion was soon himself to pass through a very furnace of

affliction. He contracted the dread disease of leprosy. This he bore with exemplary fortitude, and passed away after a lingering illness in the glory of an unclouded hope. He died at Ferstikla near the parsonage of Saurby in the year 1674.

The Passion-Hymns are fifty in number. They tell the story of Christ's sufferings from the moment when the Master sang the Pascal Hymn with His disciples in the Upper Room until the military watch was set and the seal made fast upon His tomb. Each hymn consists, as a rule, of from fifteen to twenty stanzas. The poet begins by paraphrasing the biblical narrative of that incident in the Passion Story with which he is about to deal. He thus accomplishes what is achieved in Oratorio by the recitative. He then passes on to meditation, exhortation, prayer or praise. The hymns were written to be sung, generally speaking, to German chorales of the sixteenth century. With these tunes of stately dignity they naturally blend. To sing them to lighter modern airs would jar on the ear as a kind of sacrilege. In fact, to fully appreciate the hymns, it is necessary to hear them sung to these slow and majestic melodies from the times of Luther, which give free play and scope to the beauty of the Icelandic vowel sounds.

In former days it was the custom in the scattered farm-houses of Iceland to sing the Passion-Hymns through during Lent. This custom is still to some extent observed, as, for instance, in the chief Icelandic Church in Winnipeg. Nor can a better preparation for Good Friday, the "Long Fast Day," as it is called by the Icelanders, be well imagined.

The practice however is not as universal as it was, partly owing to the indifference which pervades so much of the modern world, and partly through the prevalence of views in recent years, which, as an Icelandic clergyman has pointed out, "must make the Passion-Hymns of Hallgrim Petursson die upon the lips." It is however still true to say that this

singer of the Cross is the outstanding poet of his people. His hymns have been called "The flower of all Icelandic poetry." He is still sung and quoted with reverence and with affection. He holds his position, we might almost say, as the Shakespeare or the Milton of his native land. If we seek the reasons for the spell which the Passion-Hymns have cast over the heart of Iceland for nearly two centuries and a half, we shall not have to look far for an answer. It is true that the range of thought is not wide, that the style is sometimes almost irritatingly didactic, and that the charm of colouring from nature through metaphor or simile is conspicuous only by its absence. The Passion-Hymns possess, however, one mighty secret. In exquisite Icelandic the poet dwells upon the benefits procured for sinful man by Christ's Passion. He isolates (and surely we may forgive him for doing so) each particular suffering which the Redeemer underwent, and shows the gain wrought for man thereby. Was Christ left alone in His hour of need? It was that we might never be forsaken. Was Christ clothed in a robe of mockery? It was that we might be arrayed in a robe of glory. Was Christ hounded to death with the cry of "Crucify Him?" It was that heaven and earth might over us call "peace." Were Christ's feet pierced? It was that the sins of our wayward feet might be forgiven. Was Christ's side, as Adam's, opened? It was that His Bride, the Church, in that healing stream of Water and of Blood, might be born. The Passion of Christ is the adoring poet's theme. Now in homely teaching, now in pathetic prayer, now in rapturous praise, he "placards" Christ Crucified before his countrymen. He raised, as it were, a mighty crucifix of song over Iceland, and thither, for nearly two centuries and a half, the weary and the heavy laden have turned their eyes. He sang the theme of the ages, and his song has become immortal.

Matthías Jochumsson, the leading poet of modern Iceland, has written a

beautiful ode to commemorate the bicentenary of Hallgrim Petursson's death. He therein speaks of him as "the David of this land of Jokulls." He calls him a light "who lightened two centuries." He tells us that from the time when the child first says his prayers at his mother's knee, until the day when as an old man he turns him to his last sleep, it is Hallgrim's hymns which have power to soothe and to heal. And when Matthías Jochumsson is describing in another poem the passing of Gudbrand Vigfusson, the great Icelander of Oxford, he pictures him lying with the Havamal^{[45][1]} at his head, Heimskringla at his breast, but the Passion-Hymns at his heart. That is their secret. The Passion-Hymns have spoken to the heart of Iceland.

^{[46][1]}Readers of Longfellow's "Saga of King Olaf," in the "Tales from a Wayside Inn," will need no explanation of these terms.

THE MODERN ICELANDIC HYMN BOOK AND BISHOP VALDIMAR BRIEM

The present Hymn Book of the Icelandic Lutheran Church appeared first in the year 1886. It is the fourth in order since the Reformation.

First came the Grallari (from the Latin "Graduale") of 1594--a book which maintained its position as the official Icelandic Church Book for two centuries. The Evangelisk-Kristileg Sálmaþók followed in 1801, a work of a mildly rationalistic type. In 1871 a new hymn book appeared, which was an improvement on its predecessor. At last in 1886 the present book was authorized, a book which won immediate recognition as a vast improvement on all its predecessors, a book which, speaking generally, contains what was best in them with much admirable new material besides.

On examination one remarkable feature is revealed. The book contains 650 hymns. Of this entire number, two men alone are responsible for 353, Helgi Hálfðánarson for 211, and Bishop Valdimar Briem for 142. Each of these two writers makes his characteristic contribution. The work of the former consisted in making available for the Icelandic Church, flowers culled from the wider field of Lutheran Hymnology. Helgi Hálfðánarson excelled as a translator. Not only did he translate hymns, untranslated into Icelandic before, but he retranslated hymns, faulty versions of which had appeared in the previous Icelandic Hymn Books. The present book owes an immense debt to this work of his. The characteristic contribution, on the other hand, of Bishop Valdimar Briem lies in his original hymns. Of these the book contains 106, and they may be said to form its most outstanding feature. It was through these hymns mainly that the new book achieved its immediate popularity.

The editor of *Sameiningin* wrote: "Icelandic sacred poetry has been raised to new honour. For that our people have chiefly Valdimar Briem to thank." Valdimar Briem takes his place beside Hallgrim Petursson. This pastor-poet's outward life has been uneventful. Born at Grund, near the Eyjafjörður, in 1848, he was sent at the age of ten (being one of a large family) to live with an uncle. In 1863 he entered the Latin School at Reykjavik, and in 1870 was transferred to the Theological College. He was ordained priest in 1873. Subsequently he was appointed to Stórinúpur, a little country charge about fifteen miles to the north-west of the famous volcano of Hekla, and there he still lives and writes, although raised recently to the episcopal rank. His output has been immense. He has published two volumes of "Bible Songs" (a collection of metrical pictures of biblical events), a volume of translations from the Psalms, a metrical paraphrase of the Book of Job, as well as hymns and many occasional poems. It is however in his hymns that he makes his chief appeal. As the Icelandic Hymn Book is scanned, it is they which first catch the eye and invite translation. And wherein lies their power? Not least in the wonderful music which the poet makes, playing on the instrument of his exquisitely musical language. His verses also live with the charm of nature, the grim charm of Icelandic nature. The long dark winter days, the biting frost, the barren surf-beaten coast, the blocking snow-drifts and the rushing torrents, have all left their impress on his hymns, as well as the fair Icelandic flowers, the summer sunlight, and the snow-capped mountain peaks. In this connection it is interesting to notice how often a kind of Christian melancholy sounds in these poems. Death and sorrow are mentioned more frequently than life and service, though always the heavenly hope shines through to lighten the darkness. Our author's special strength however lies in his original treatment of

the parables and miracles of Our Lord. In this he excels. Is he writing on the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard? He is not content to think of different men being called at different hours, but his voice rings out, "Remember that God calls you in baptism, in youth, in manhood, and in old age." Is he treating of the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration? He allegorizes it into a picture of the present prayer-life of the soul. Does he sing of the miracle at Cana? His hymn is an invitation to the Divine Guest to come into our hearts, there to transform sin into holiness. So noticeable is this feature of Bishop Briem's writing, that in the section of the Icelandic Hymn Book in which are grouped hymns on Christ's "Life and Teaching," those bearing the signature "V. B." vastly preponderate over those of any other Icelandic author.

Perhaps we might fitly describe his chief work by saying that as Hallgrim Petursson was the singer of Our Lord's Death and Passion, so Valdimar Briem has sung of His Life.

MATTHÍAS JOCHUMSSON

Helgi Hálfðánarson was born in 1826. After graduating from the College in Reykjavik he studied Theology in the University of Copenhagen. He was ordained in 1854. In 1867 he became a professor on the staff of the Theological Seminary in Reykjavik. In 1885 he succeeded to the office of Principal, a post which he held till his death in 1894. A man of a sincere Christian character, a Lutheran of the old school, his influence lives on not least in the admirable translations of foreign hymns which he bequeathed as a legacy to the Icelandic Church.

This poet, whose name may be said to lead the company of those whose writings have marked the Icelandic literary revival of the nineteenth century, was born in the year 1835. He graduated from the Reykjavik College in 1863, and from the Theological Seminary two years later. He was ordained in 1867, and was for some time in charge of Akureyri, the metropolis of the North. He is still living as a pastor emeritus.

THE BONDS OF CHRIST

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

7.7.7.7.7.7

Jesus in Gethsemane

Bowed with mortal strife I see:

Conscience stings me, for I know

'Twas my sin constrained Him so:

All that weight of agony

God's Son underwent for me.

Lo! my sin doth heavier lie

E'en than earth and sea and sky:

Jesus in His Father's name

Bears this universal frame;

Yet the Word of God falls low,

When He bears sin's weight of woe.

Thus Thou givest me, Lord, Thy peace;

Comfort which can never cease:

Greater than paid ransom's worth

Unto God than heaven and earth:

By Thine agony I win

Certain pardon for my sin.

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

8.6.8.6 D

Jesus, the Son of God, was bound

That I might go forth free;

He, chafed with cruel fetters, found

Unbounded grace for me:

Around His wrists the cords of pain
Harsh, agonizing, lay:
From me in that dread hour sin's chain
Unfastened fell away.
Lord, let the bonds that bound Thee hold
Me bound in bondage pure,
Kept mid temptations manifold,
Shut from the world's allure;
That so my will, untrammelled, free,
Whiles here I dwell below,
May aye Thy ready servant be.
This boon, dear Lord, bestow!

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

8.6.8.6

Lo! now is the accepted time!

Heed thou God's call to-day!

E'en while we sing salvation's hour

Glides noiselessly away.

Give heed, for that one hour misused

Thine endless doom decides;

On Him, who such salvation spurns,

The wrath of God abides.

More dread the punishment must fall

When mercy's day is o'er,

Upon that man with whom God's love

Most patiently forbore.

Take heed unto thyself, my soul;

To hoard thy sin relent;

Behold yon quickly westering sun;

Delay no more; repent.

Perchance the hour of grace divine

This night may pass away.

Dear pardoning Lord, we leave our sin,

We come to Thee, to-day.

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

7.6.7.6 D

The pathway of Thy Passion

To follow I desire;

Out of my weakness fashion

A character of fire.

When the weak will sinks failing,

And flesh starts back afraid,

Before the dread Cross quailing,

Lord, grant Thy Spirit's aid.

THE RECOMPENSE

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

6.6.8.6

Whene'er in act or word,
Slighting Thy warning grace,
Like Peter, I deny Thee, Lord,
Toward me turn Thy face.
Yea, Master, turn and look
On me in love untold:
Cast that same searching glance, which broke
The Apostle's heart of old;
Until with weeping eyes
I gaze toward Thy heaven:
Then, Saviour, speak the word, "Arise!
Arise, restored, forgiven!"

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

8.6.8.6 D

E'er since beneath God's open sky
The wounded Saviour came,
From Pilate's hall led forth to die
Upon the Cross of Shame,
For me the road has open lain
To God's bright halls of day;
The barrier of my sin Christ's pain
For ever bore away.

A PRAYER

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

7.7.7.7.7.7

Jesus, Lord, remember me;

Ease my hour of mortal strife:

Let my children find in Thee

Guidance through this earthly life:

Write, with those dear names I love,

My name in Thy Book above.

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

8.8.8.8.8.8

My life I draw, Lord, from Thy Death;

Thy Cross my comfort perfecteth.

O let Thy Passion's mighty power

Work in my bosom from this hour,

And crucify me, Lord, that I

To Thee may live, to sin may die.

A DOXOLOGY

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

8.7.8.7.8.8.7

Forsaken of God on Calvary

The Saviour Christ hung dying,

That I might ne'er forsaken be,

While on His death relying:

Yea, for the sake of His lone cry,

With ready ear the Lord Most High

Will aye regard my crying.

When from earth's light I pass away,

Sight, hearing, sense declining,

Father, recall Thy Son's dismay,

For Thy felt presence pining;

And by that cry from Calvary's tree

Thy countenance uplift on me,

With gracious welcome shining.

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

10.10.10.10 D

Thou art, O Christ, the everlasting Son!

Thou, by Thy Death, for sinful man a share

In Thy divine inheritance hast won,

And made him with Thyself, God's Son, co-heir,--

Thyself, the One Begotten of God's love!

Therefore let all the sons of men upraise

To Thee, God's Son, an anthem of high praise,

Through endless days, in earth and heaven above.

GOD'S GARDEN

1.)

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

9.8.9.8.9.8

Beneath the Cross of Jesus kneeling,
Dawns on my soul the endless day;
There, deeper than all tides of feeling,
Doth God His boundless grace display;
Thence flow the mystic waves of healing;
There all my stains are washed away.
God wrought for man, His love forth-shewing,
When Moses smote the rock of old;
And, lo, through Israel's camp on-flowing,
Out brake the longed-for flood, and rolled,
New strength, new joy, new life bestowing,
On lips that quaffed it, pure and cold.
God wrought for man, mankind redeeming,
When Christ was pierced by Roman spear,
And, o'er the thirsty world down-streaming,
Forth gushed a fountain, cool and clear,
Till souls, beside those waters gleaming,
Forgot in joy sin's desert drear.
Beside that well for aye abiding,
New strength, new joy, new life I gain;
Within that cleft securely hiding,
No care can cark, no sorrow stain;
Here rests the blissful soul confiding,

Here faith the healing draught can drain.
Lord, let my heart, this gift receiving,
Beat one glad anthem to Thy praise;
And may the stream, Thy pierced heart leaving
Refresh and heal me all my days:
Thus by Thy blood my life retrieving,
A psalm of endless thanks I'll raise.

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

8.8.8.8.8.8

Behold God's Garden! Resting here
Soft sleep till dawn God's children dear.
Whene'er thou passest by this place
Breathe low a fervent prayer for grace.
Death ponder; then, with hope up-borne,
Think on the Resurrection Morn.

HALLGRIM PETURSSON'S DEATH-BED HYMN

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

7.6.7.6 D

I know that my Redeemer
Lives crowned upon the throne;
Lord over earth and heaven
He saves, and He alone;
He conquered death by dying
Upon the accursed tree,
And from His death sprang glorious
Eternal life for me.
Christ conquered death by dying--
Jesu, Thy mortal pain
O'erthrew the King of Terrors
And brake the captive's chain.
What though this earthly body
Obey Death's dread behest?
The soul soars free rejoicing
To mansions of the blest.
I think upon my Saviour,
I trust His power to keep,
His mighty arm enfolds me
Awaking and in sleep.
Christ is my rock, my courage;
Christ is my soul's true life;
And Christ (my still heart knows it)
Will bear me through the strife.

Thus in Christ's name I'm living;
Thus in Christ's name I'll die;
I'll fear not though life's vigour
From Death's cold shadow fly.
O Grave, where is thy triumph?
O Death, where is thy sting?
"Come when thou wilt, and welcome!"
Secure in Christ I sing.

Hallgrim Petursson (1614-1674)

10.10.10.10

Come, Lord, Thyself with Thine abounding grace;
Mine utmost depth of need Thine eyes can trace:
Thou, Lord, through life's long way my Guard and Guide;
Let not Thy pilgrim's last tired footsteps slide.
Upon my sight dark dawns the rising day;
Faint fall the sounds of earth, and far away:
None, none can aid; by death's lone, narrow door,
I pass beyond man's help for evermore.
None, none can aid but Thou, Almighty Lord;
I stay me on Thine everlasting Word;
Let earth decay, heaven's far-flung glories pale,
Jehovah's plighted word can never fail.
Within the Eternal Arms I sink to rest,
Washed in the stream that flowed from Jesus' breast:
The life Thou gavest, Father, now defend;
Into Thine Hands my spirit I commend.
Let the last psalm my dying voice can raise,
Extol Thy loving-kindness, hymn Thy praise:
Let the first notes my wakening lips can frame

Amid the eternal glory, laud Thy Name.

First, midst, and last, through that unclouded day,

I would my Saviour's boundless grace display,

And swell the anthems of the ransomed host,

Adoring Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

AN AUTUMN HYMN^[47][2]

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

7.6.7.6 D

How glorious is God's greatness!

How marvellous God's might!

To this the world bears witness

In wonders day and night;

In form of flower and snowflake,

In morn's resplendent birth,

In afterglow at even,

In sky and sea and earth!

Each tiny floweret whispers

The great Life-giver's name;

The mighty mountain masses

His majesty proclaim;

The hollow vales are hymning

God's shelter for His own;

The snow-capped peaks are pointing

To God's almighty throne.

The ocean's vast abysses

In one grand psalm record

The deep mysterious counsels

And mercy of the Lord;

The ice-cold waves of winter

Are thundering on the strand,

"E'en grief's chill stream is guided

By God's all-gracious hand."

The starry hosts are singing
Through all the light-strewn sky,
Of God's eternal Temple
And Palace-courts on high.
When, in these outer chambers,
Such glory gilds the gloom,
What the transcendent brightness
Of God's own Presence Room!
Kaspar Johannes Boye (1791-1853)

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

8.6.8.6

Full soon will fall the winter rain,
Soon fade the green hill-side;
With all thy glory, fare thee well,
Thou radiant summer-tide.
Full soon will wail the winter wind,
Soon fail the flowers that blow;
Let autumn blight the buds of earth,
The flower of Hope doth grow!
What though the sunlight wane? ne'er wanes
The grace of Christ the Lord;
Amid the gathering gloom shines on
God's everlasting Word.
Though leaf may wither, floweret fade,
Though tiny grass blade pale;
Our hearts can trust a surer truth--
God's love shall never fail.
Though winter chill each struggling herb,
My gladness ne'er can cease;

From Bethlehem calls a voice, "To you
Is born the Prince of Peace."

Upon my fairest trees of hope

Lies cold a robe of snow;

But from the Tree where Jesus died

The Living Waters flow.

Though fade the grass on hill and dale,

Though ice bind stream and fell;

My faith in Him shall never fail,

Who burst the bonds of Hell.

Good hope of everlasting spring

His Church the Saviour gave.

Rejoice! Rejoice! The Life Himself

Is risen from the grave!

^48][2]The Icelandic of Bishop Valdimar Briem is based on a Danish
hymn by Kaspar Johannes Boye.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

10.10.10.10

This wondrous world, my God, a book I deem,
Wherein the Author's heavenly glories shine:
The petals of the wayside flowers meseem
Its pages, pencilled o'er by hand divine.
The sun that soars above the eastern deep
Toward the realms celestial beckoneth me;
The glowing orb, which westering sinks to sleep,
Tells of eternal rest and peace with Thee.
Within my breast fair spring's life-laden wind
Kindles new hope in Thine abounding grace;
The gathering gloom of autumn bids me find
Within Thy sheltering arms my hiding place.
The countless stars which gleam athwart the sky,
Speak of Thine eyes which sleep not day nor night;
While at my feet the earth-born flowers reply,
"We live our lowly lives within God's sight."
Grant me, dear Lord, to scan Thy works, until
My heart their soothing ministry doth own.
What though Thy might the flesh with awe instil?
The spirit yearns to Thine all-gracious throne.

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

10.10.10.10.10.10

Oft in death's shadowy vale, like screen of night,
Before life's Sun the driving cloud-mists blow;

No way lies open to the halls of light,
The passes stand deep blocked by drifted snow;
Lord, ever let Thy heavens unclouded shine;
Lighten Thy pilgrim's eyes with light divine.
Oft in the narrow rock-girt paths of life,
The weary will would fail, the strength would flee;
I stagger weakened by the unceasing strife,
Fainting I fall, unless Thou succour me:
What time the o'erburdened spirit dreads defeat,
O champion her, Thou heavenly Paraclete.
Oft mid the noisy tumult of the world
No more I hear the angels' healing song,
Only the torrents' threatening roar, where hurled
In rapids time's swift stream is borne along:
Lord, o'er the surge of waters rude and wild,
Grant me to hear Thy call, "My child! My child!"
When o'er mine eyelids steals the long last sleep,
Thy face's unveiled glory would I see;
The weary flesh seeks rest in slumber deep,
With might, O let my spirit strengthened be.
Earth's voices fade; deep mid the peace of heaven,
Speak, Lord, the assuring words, "Arise, forgiven!"

THE DIVINE GUEST

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

8.7.8.7 D

I stand by the lonely breakers
And gaze o'er the misty sea,
Which wrapt in the clouds of winter
Is heaving sullenly:
'Tis a shore where gaunt Need reigneth,
And Woe with her freezing breath;
For the shore is the shore of the dying,
And the sea is the sea of death.
But far o'er the dim horizon
There lieth a land that is fair;
The sun with his gorgeous colours
Is painting the cloud-banks there:
There, robing the green hill-shoulders,
The golden flowerets grow;
And the fruit-trees' cloaks of blossom
In the spicy breezes blow.
Girt round with a mystic glory
Fair palaces I behold,
With many a sculptured pillar,
With many a tower of gold;
The hosts of the saved, resplendent
In glistening white array,
Mid rapture untold are thronging
Those corridors of day.

In silence I yearn as I listen
To the far-off chime of bells:
How nobly the voice of worship
Through the heavenly Temple swells!
I hark to the shout of the victors,
I list to the angels' lays,
As they sing to the Lord of Glory
Grand anthems of endless praise.
Speak! Is this a baseless fabric
Reared high by the dreams of man?
Nay! Nay! tis the fair fulfilment
Of God's everlasting plan.
Sure speaks the eternal promise,
Sure works the almighty grace,
Till the strife-men^{[49][3]} of earth are marshalled
Triumphant before God's face.

^{[50][3]}"Strife-men" is a literal rendering of the Icelandic word
meaning "soldiers."

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

8.6.8.6 D

O Thou who madest water wine
At Cana's festal board,
Remember me, great Guest Divine,
And speak the mighty word;
The sin that taints life's mingled cup
Transform to Christian grace;
And for just anger, Lord, lift up
The shining of Thy face.
Thy time, O Christ, is not yet come

Heaven's rapture to bestow;
But grant that, exiled here from home,
My heart may thither go:
The earth-renewing sunshine sleeps
Till winter's storms be passed;
And so Thy wisdom, Saviour, keeps
The good wine till the last.
If Thou should'st deign my guest to be,
Full well may I rejoice;
Each anxious festal want shall flee
Thine all-creating voice.
Come sup with me on earth, dear Lord,
Where tears with gladness blend,
That I may join Thy heavenly board
In bliss that knows no end.

THE HOLY MOUNT

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

8.6.8.6 D

When winds far-blown from realms of pain
Lash sorrow's storm-waves high,
Thou deemest, tossed on life's rough main,
That death looms threatening by:
Thou callest, "Christ, whose voice once curbed
With power the raging deep,
Where is Thy might? All-undisturbed
Thou liest, O Lord, asleep."
What though He seem to sleep? yea, e'en
To slight thine anguished cries?
Yield not to gaunt despair; serene
Against the danger rise.
He sleeps not. Nay! 'tis we that sleep:
Untouched by slumber's power
He watches. Would that we could keep
Such watch with Him one hour!
Behold Him rise in majesty!
Shame on thy faithless fears!
He stays the wind, He stills the sea,
From off the rocks He steers.
So watch, for 'tis Thy Lord's command,
Thyself in calm or strife;
For hard the task, and weak the hand,
And short the course of life.

Give heed to watch, give heed to pray,
But scorn thy guilty fear,
Though mighty billows night and day
Their threatening crests uprear.
What if untracked before thy face
The watery wastes expand?
The helm, through God's abounding grace,
Lies in thy Saviour's hand.
Midst black confusion of the storm,
Midst moan of winds, He hears;
And ever at the stern His Form,
Majestic, God-like steers;
Till onward past death's ice-bound strand,
Where pain's wild breakers foam,
He guides thee to that Blessed Land,
Anchored in endless home.

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

11.6.11.6 D

What though this weary earth-born flesh lie fettered
In prison-house of night?
The spirit rises heavenward, upward ranging
Toward the realms of light:
Up to the ray-crowned peak her Lord she follows,
With sin-purged eyes to scan
From that clear height the fair far-spreading vistas
Of God's redeeming plan.
Yea, though the flesh, far-sundered from the dawning,
Mid shades of death here lie,
The soul upon the mount of faith ascending

In prayer to heaven draws nigh.
So high that hill that in the darkling distance
Earth's troubles fade away;
Close, close at hand the high things and the holy
Stand forth in fair array.
Far, far below, down in the earth-girt valley,
Night broods upon the clod.
Look up! along the mountain crest is breaking
The glad sunrise of God.
There hidden things are plain; there, vision-gifted,
The eye may pierce the gloom
Which curtains time and space, yea, rend the blackness
That shrouds the unanswering tomb.
On earth insistent sing the siren voices
Which lure to carnal ease:
There reigns the silence of a dream, the stillness
Of the eternal peace.
Time's voices fade; in awe I hear the beating
Of God's great heart of love;
While on my breast the dews of healing quiet
Steal softly from above.
So on the mountain summit, domed in glory,
My pilgrim tent I'll raise:
'Tis good for me, thus close to God abiding,
To dwell through endless days;
To catch some beams of that divine effulgence
There from Christ's face outpoured,
Until my face transfigured glow reflecting
The glory of the Lord.

Then, when death comes, a cloud of mystic brightness

O'ershadowing shall draw near:

Within its folds soft calling, "My beloved,"

The Saviour's voice I'll hear.

Yea, though death's chill mist shroud life's flowery valley,

It hath no power to affright:

I raise mine eyes, and near me Jesus only

Stands in immortal light.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

7.6.7.6 D

Good Shepherd, Thou who gavest
Thy life upon the Cross,
A sacrifice to save us
From sin's eternal loss,
Grant us in dear remembrance
Thy wondrous gift to keep,
Bought by Thy blood and numbered,
Saviour, among Thy sheep.
Sure stands our steadfast comfort,
For Thou our Shepherd art;
With this bright faith no sorrow
Can overwhelm the heart;
Thou leadest forth Thy people
Where living waters flow;
With fruits celestial feedest
On Calvary's Tree that grow.
What though the wolf would drive us
Far from this blissful ground?
The Lord with arm of glory
Doth compass us around;
And over stream and mountain,
Whene'er self-willed we roam,
The Shepherd on His shoulders
Rejoicing bears us home.

One day in God's new heavens,
Jerusalem above,
Their Guide the sheep will follow,
Drawn on with cords of love,
Through life's immortal pastures,
Through raptures all untold,
One flock for everlasting,
One Shepherd, and one fold.

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

8.8.8.8.8.8

Unto God's House in olden day
Two men together went to pray;
This for his right deeds sought reward,
That for mere mercy low implored.
When in Thine House to Thee I cry,
Lord, whether of the twain am I?
Ofttimes I kneel, a Pharisee
In sinful self-complacency,
Though nought I have, and all I owe:
Thy pardon, gracious Lord, bestow,
And grant that humbler mind which stayed
Far off in temple courts, and prayed.
I dare not lift mine eyes on high
To search the glories of the sky;
But, seated on Thy throne of light,
Thou, Lord, canst pierce this earthly night;
Thine eyes can count each contrite tear,
No sigh but finds Thy listening ear.
My breast I smite in sorrow sore,

And lo! I knock at Mercy's door:
Be each unlocked--my breast to Thee,
Thy Kingdom's boundless realm to me:
So make my heart, from sin washed pure,
Thy Kingdom, Lord, for evermore.

A WHITSUNTIDE HYMN

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

7.6.7.6.8.8

What time life's early morning
Is purpling in thy sky,
And on thy brow lies glistening
With glory from on high
The font's fresh dew, Thy Lord doth say,
"Go! In my Vineyard work to-day."
At the third hour, when gorgeous
The sun of youth doth rise,
And life's entrancing glamour
Allures thy wondering eyes,
Remember! Still He calleth thee
To tend His Vineyard faithfully.
At noon when all-reluctant
The hard-pressed toilers work,
Hark! Still that Voice is calling;
One task thou dar'st not shirk--
To make that vine-row wondrous fair,
Which He hath trusted to thy care.
At the last hour He calleth,
When westering sinks life's sun,
And sable twilight falleth
E'er half the task be done:
While the last fading day-beams shine
Toil on! toil on in strength divine.

At night the Lord His workmen
Himself doth homeward lead:
Each wins the self-same wages,
Eternal life the meed.

God! 'Tis Thy gift, not our reward!

All merit flows from Christ the Lord!

Valdimar Briem (1848-1930)

11.10.11.10 D

Lord, let Thy Spirit, from earthly passion weaning,
Lead me along Thy will's all-holy way,
To find, by faith on Jesus' bosom leaning,
'Mid trial, doubt, and need, in Him my stay.
Lord, let Thy Spirit, Thy Word's deep wealth unsealing,
Lighten mine eyes with truth's celestial fire;
In life, in death, the narrow path revealing
Towards the Promised Land of our desire.
Lord, let Thy Spirit, new love, new life bestowing,
Create a holy heart my breast within;
That I, into my Saviour's likeness growing,
May bear His image through a world of sin.
Lord, let Thy Spirit, each idol form down-tearing,
Cast from my soul the thoughts, the sins that stain;
Within those walls a temple meet preparing,
Where Jesus evermore may dwell, and reign.

VESPER HYMN^[53][5]

Björn Halldórsson (1821-1882)

7.6.7.6 D

Let Thy summer gift, O Lord,
Pardon be, and peace and power:
Sun of Life Divine, abroad
All Thy healing radiance shower.
This world's sun before our eyes
Chases far cold winter's night:
Jesu, Sun of Grace, arise;
Shed on us Thy heavenly light.

^[52][4]After the Icelandic of Provost Björn Halldórsson, senior, A.D.
1841.

Páll Jónsson

7.6.7.6 D

On the wings of light declining
Sinks the westering sun to sleep:
Lord, alike in dark or shining,
Thy pure eyes their vigil keep.
Let Thy light, which faileth never,
Round me shine, though day depart;
And, though night prevaieth, ever
Flood the chambers of my heart.

^[54][5]After the Icelandic of Páll Jónsson, A.D. 1889.

AN EASTER HYMN^[57][7]

Arnór Jónsson

7.6.7.6 D

The sun sinks o'er the western sea,
Swift fades the light of day;
Thus ends another stage for me
Of life's soon travelled way.
Whether athwart the eastern skies,
With morning glories strown,
A new-born day for me shall rise,
God knows, and God alone.
Enough for me to know that life
Moves to its certain goal,
And that the hour of mortal strife
My Father's hands control.
Enough to feel (and so in peace
To rest, dear Lord, I go);
Thy care for me can never cease,
Thy love ne'er weary grow.
Father of love, to Thee we bow;
Do Thou in mercy keep
Our land, our home in peace, as now
We lay us down to sleep.

^[56][6]After the Icelandic of Arnór Jónsson, A.D. 1853.

Helgi Hálfðánarson (1826-1894)

7.6.7.6 D

Death is dead, the true Life liveth!

O'er the portals of the grave
Life's great Sun bright-shining giveth
Light our darkened souls to save:
Christ arisen bursts our prison;
See His triumph-banners wave.
Life's own King on Calvary dying
Wins a crown of life for me;
E'en the grave to Him complying
Flowers in life abundant free;
Death's chill sadness changed to gladness--
This the Easter victory!
He who rose from death all-glorious
Soon will gather to His side
Those who sleep in Him, victorious
By the blood His wounds supplied;
Flesh and spirit, through His merit,
Reunited, glorified.
Jesu, death's Destroyer, make me
Day by day to die with Thee;
Thus, with Thee arising, take me
Thine through all the days to be--
Thine for ever, faithless never--
This my prayer unceasingly.
^[58][7]After the Icelandic of Helgi Hálfðánarson.

ICELANDIC MILLENNIAL HYMN^[61][9]

Matthías Jochumsson

7.6.7.6 D

O Lord, my soul's true Sun, to rest
Day's orb is sinking in the West;
As earth's light fades, upon my sight
Let dawn Thy everlasting light.
Come breathe on us a holy peace;
Bid every haunting fear to cease;
Our sin-sick spirits heal, and aid
Thy servants in Thine image made.
Dear Saviour, seek each wandering child,
Lost on the snow-waste bare and wild,
Until he taste, no more to roam,
The warm love of the Father's home.
Thou knowest, Lord, each secret need;
The hungry from Thy bounty feed;
Spare hearts too weak to conquer wrong,
And in Thy strength, O make them strong.
On all who stray with blinded sight
Mid heathen darkness day and night,
Uplift the shining of Thy face,
And show them Jesus' throne of grace.
O let Thy light with power imbue
Each withered soul to flower anew;
Thy spirit grant mid earthly strife,
Blest earnest of eternal life.

^60][8]After the Icelandic of Matthías Jochumsson.

Matthías Jochumsson (1835-1920)

7.6.7.6 D

God of our land, our father's God, receive
The hymn we raise to Thine all-holy name.

Thy crown the ministering ages weave
Of suns celestial, galaxies of flame.

To Thee one day is as a thousand years,
A thousand years to Thee are but a day,
A flower of endless time, bedewed with tears,
Which glorifies its God, and fades away--

Our thousand years,
A flower of endless time, bedewed with tears,
Which glorifies its God and fades away.

God of our Iceland, now with burning heart
We offer Thee this sacrifice of praise;

From age to age Thou, Lord, our Father art;
Our holy anthem unto Thee we raise:

To Thee, as now are told our thousand years,
We sing, for other refuge have we none:

To Thee our voices lift, midst falling tears,
Great Shaper of our lot, whilst ages run.

Our thousand years!

Midst gloom of morning twilight, lo! our tears,
Lit with the glory of the rising sun.

God of our land, our father's God, behold!

We are but fading flower and withering grass;

If Thou be not our light and life, to mould,

After spring's transient gleam, we fade and pass.

Be, Lord, each morn a spring of endless life;
Our Captain midst the battle of the day;
At eve our heavenly resting place from strife,
The Leader of Thy people's pilgrim way.
Our thousand years!

Increase the nation! Wipe away all tears!

We join the Host of God towards the day!

Robert Scott, Paternoster Row, London, E.C.

^62]9]After the Icelandic of Matthías Jochumsson.

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