

WRITINGS OF GEORGE MATHESON

by George Matheson

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by George Matheson, compiled for study and devotional reading.

12 Chapters

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01.01. Gather Us in, Thou Love That Fillest All

Gather Us in, Thou Love That Fillest All By George Matheson Gather us in, Thou Love that fillest all;

Gather our rival faiths within Thy fold;

Rend each man's temple veil, and bid it fall, That we may know that Thou hast been of old.

Gather us in, we worship only Thee; In varied names we stretch a common hand; In diverse forms a common soul we see; In many ships we seek one spirit land.

Thine is the mystic life great India craves;

Thine is the Parsee's sin-destroying beam;

Thine is the Buddhist's rest from tossing waves;

Thine is the empire of vast China's dream.

Thine is the Roman's strength without his pride;

Thine is the Greek's glad world without its graves;

Thine is Judea's law with love beside, The truth that censures and the grace that saves.

Some seek a Father in the heav'ns above;

Some ask a human image to adore;

Some crave a spirit vast as life and love;

Within Thy mansions we have all and more.

01.02. Make Me a Captive, Lord

Make Me a Captive, Lord By George Matheson Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.

Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life's alarms when by myself I stand;

Imprison me within Thine arms, and strong shall be my hand. My heart is weak and poor until it master find;

It has no spring of action sure, it varies with the wind.

It cannot freely move till Thou has wrought its chain;

Enslave it with Thy matchless love, and deathless it shall reign. My power is faint and low till I have learned to serve;

It lacks the needed fire to glow, it lacks the breeze to nerve.

It cannot drive the world until itself be driven; Its flag can only be unfurled when Thou shalt breathe from heaven. My will is not my own till Thou hast made it Thine;

If it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown resign.

It only stands unbent amid the clashing strife, When on Thy bosom it has leant, and found in Thee its life.

01.03. O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go

O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go By George Matheson Matheson said about this hymn: My hymn was composed in the manse of Innelan [Argyleshire, Scotland] on the evening of the 6th of June, 1882, when I was 40 years of age. I was alone in the manse at that time. It was the night of my sister's marriage, and the rest of the family were staying overnight in Glasgow. Something happened to me, which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering. It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life. I had the impression of having it dictated to me by some inward voice rather than of working it out myself. I am quite sure that the whole work was completed in five minutes, and equally sure that it never received at my hands any retouching or correction. I have no natural gift of rhythm. All the other verses I have ever written are manufactured articles; this came like a dayspring from on high.

O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee;

I give thee back the life I owe, That in thine ocean depths its flow May richer, fuller be.

O light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch to thee; My heart restores its borrowed ray, That in thy sunshine's blaze its day May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee;

I trace the rainbow through the rain, And feel the promise is not vain, That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee;

I lay in dust life's glory dead, And from the ground there blossoms red Life that shall endless be.

S. All Types

All Types By George Matheson

"When they saw the boldness of Peter and John...they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

These two men drew one quality from the same source; they had both become bold from living with Jesus. Yet it was not the same kind of boldness. Peter and John were both courageous; yet the courage of Peter was as unlike the courage of John as the sun is unlike the moon. When Christ gives the same quality to two men He does not thereby make them the same man. The light which shines on the wall comes from the same source as the light which shines on the river; but no one would mistake the light on the river for the light on the wall. Even so, no one would mistake the courage of Peter for the courage of John. They are not only different; they are in some sense opposite. Peter has the courage that strikes; John has the courage that waits. Peter is a force of action; John is a force of bearing. Peter draws the sword; John lies on the bosom. Peter crosses the sea to meet Jesus; John tarries till the Lord comes. Peter goes into the sepulchre where the body of Jesus has lain; John merely looks in--keeps the image of sorrow in his heart.

Christ needs each of these types. There are times when His kingdom requires the courage of the hand--the power of actual contact with danger. There are times when it needs the courage of the heart--the power to wait when nothing can be done, and to keep the spirit up when the hand must be let down. Life has both its Galilee and its Patmos--its place for work and its place for waiting; and for both it requires courage.

S. Blind Matheson Penned Immortal Hymn

Blind Matheson Penned Immortal Hymn By George Matheson

George Matheson was hurting. It was not physical pain that cut him, or regret for the blindness that had robbed him of sight by the time he was eighteen. Rather, it was anguish of spirit.

It was on this day, June 6, 1882, the day of his sister's marriage. His family was staying overnight in Glasgow, Scotland, leaving him alone in the Manse (a parsonage). Something happened to forty-year old George as he sat alone there in the darkness of his blindness, something known only to himself, something which caused him severe mental suffering. He never confided to anyone what the problem was, and yet his heart cried out to Christ. As his heart moaned, words welled up in his mind, words of comfort. "I had the impression of having it dictated to me by some inward voice rather than of working it out myself," he said later. He jotted the lines down.

O Love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee;

I give thee back the life I owe, That in thine ocean depths its flow May richer, fuller be.

O light that followest all my way, I yield my flickering torch to thee; My heart restores its borrowed ray, That in thy sunshine's blaze its day May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to thee;

I climb the rainbow through the rain, And feel the promise is not vain, That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head, I dare not ask to fly from thee;

I lay in dust life's glory dead, And from the ground there blossoms red Life that shall endless be. In less than five minutes, the poem was complete. The only revision he made was in line three, where he changed "I climb" to "I trace." The ease with which the stanzas came surprised him, because he had never before written verses without great difficulty. These verses written in pain became one of the great hymns of the church.

S. Hope in Waiting

Hope in Waiting By George Matheson "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam 3:26).

What a singular combination--hope and quiet waiting! It is like a union of poetry and prose. Does it not seem an incongruous mixture of sentiments! We associate hope with impulse; quiet waiting is surely the want of impulse! Hope is a state of flight; waiting implies repose. Hope is the soul on the wing; waiting is the soul in the nest. Hope is the eagerness of expectancy; waiting is a condition of placid calm. Is not that a strange union of feelings to put into one breast! No; it is a sublimely happy marriage--the happiest conceivable. There is no test of hope like quiet waiting.

If you want to measure the strength of a man's hope, you must measure the quietness of his waiting. Our hope is never so weak as when we are excited. I have seen two men who were engaged in the same cause, and who were equally bent on the cause, affected quite differently in an argument. The one was fiery, impetuous, vehement, tempted to lose temper and prompted to be abusive; the other was calm, cool, quiet, disposed to be deferential and inclined to be conciliatory. Yet the second was the man of sure hope. He was calm because he was fearless, he was silent because he was sanguine. He had seen the star in the east and he knew it was travelling westward. He did not care to argue about it, to protest about it, to lose his temper about it. He was so sure of its coming that he was willing to make concessions. He could afford to be gentle, he could afford to be generous, in the light of the morning star.

S. Law of Liberty

Law of Liberty By George Matheson "...the law of liberty" (Jas 2:12).

There are two theories in the world about the human will. One says, "Man is a slave; he is bound hand and foot; he is for ever under law." The other says, "Man is free; he is master of his own actions; law has no dominion over him." St. James suggests terms of peace between the opposing views. He says that each of them assumes something which is wrong--that "to be free" is the opposite of "to be bound." He declares that on the contrary there is such a thing as a "law of liberty"--a compulsion whose very essence consists in the strength of human will.

What is this mysterious union of contraries--this law of liberty? It can be expressed in one word--love. Love is at once the most free and the most bound of all things. We say habitually that one in love is "captivated"--made prisoner. And yet the prison is his own choice. He would not lose his chain for all the world. It is to him a golden chain--the badge not of his servitude but of his empire. It represents the freest thing in his nature--the desire of his heart. My love is my heart's desire, my heart's hunger, my heart's prayer. It is the strongest exercise of will conceivable. Nothing shows the power of my will like my love. It is the power of my personality to pass out of itself and to claim a share in yours--to say, "You are mine." James is right when he says that love is the marriage of opposites--liberty and law.

S. Left Behind

Left Behind By George Matheson

"Thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi...The Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony." (Num 1:49, Num 1:53).

Here was apparently a neglected set of men--a class overlooked in the enrolment of the people. They were to be uncounted, discounted. A spectator would have said they were a specimen of those unfit for survival. In all the work of the nation they had neither part nor lot. We read, in the parable, of the Levite passing by on the other side; but here the Levite seems to be passed by. He is left behind by the stream of the world's activities; and, with the prophet, the beholder is disposed to say that his way is hid from the Lord and his judgment overlooked by his God. And yet the beholder would be wrong. These men have not been overlooked, have not been shunted from the race of life. If they are left behind by the stream it is because there is a special duty to do which can only be done by those who are left behind. That special duty is to wait and watch. The Levites are to "keep charge of the tabernacle"--to see that no harm comes to the ark and what it contains. It seems a poor service when contrasted with the work of the numbered. In reality it was the greatest service of all. If anything had befallen the tabernacle, Israel would have collapsed immediately. The loss of ten thousand of her soldiers would have been nothing to the putting-out of her altar fire; the one might have weakened her strength, but the other would have killed her hope.

Thou who art unnumbered among the people, thou to whom there has been assigned no active work, there is a message here for thee. There is a service for the unnumbered--for those who only stand and wait. There are Levites as well as priests in the temple of thy Father. There are those who have been laid aside from active duty--who have no district to visit in, no church to preach in, no mission to serve in. Through sickness, through poverty, through the requirement to attend on others, they have been retained indoors--their names are not enrolled. Weep not that thou art among these! Lament not that thy life has been lived behind the scenes! It is behind the scenes that all great things are born.

S. Natural Law

Natural Law By George Matheson "The Lord brought an east wind...and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts" (Exo 10:13).

One is inclined to ask, Why bring the east wind at all? God was about to send a special providence for the deliverance of His people from Egypt. He was about to inflict the Egyptians with a plague of locusts. The locusts were to be His special providence, the evidence of His supreme power. Why then, does He not bring the locusts at once! Why evoke the intervention of an east wind! Would it not sound more majestic if it had simply been written, "God sent out a swarm of locusts created for the purpose of setting His people free"! Instead of that, the action of God takes the form of natural law, "The Lord brought an east wind; and, when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts." Why send His message in a common chariot when it might fly on heavenly wings! Is there not even something disappointing in the words "when it was morning"! Why should God's act have been so long in working the cure! Is not the whole passage an encouragement of men to say, "Oh, it was all done by natural causes"! Yes--and to add, "All natural causes are Divine causes." For, why is this passage written? It is just to tell us that when we see a Divine benefit coming through an east wind, or any other wind, we are not to say that on this account it comes less direct from God. It is just to tell us that when we ask God's help we ought to expect that the answer will be sent through natural channels, through human channels. It is just to tell us that when the actual heavens are silent we are not to say that there is no voice from our Father. We are to seek the answer to our prayers, not in an opening of the sky, not in an angel's wing, not in a mystic trance, but in the seeming accidents of every day--in the meeting with a friend, in the crossing of a street, in the hearing of a sermon, in the reading of a book, in the listening to a song, in the vision of a scene of beauty. We are to live in the solemn expectation that, any day of our lives, the things which environ us may become God's messengers.

S. Riding the Storms

Riding the Storms By George Matheson

"Against thy holy child Jesus--both Herod and Pontius Pilate were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27-28). The sentence ends just in the opposite way to what we are prepared for. We expect it to read thus: "Against Thy holy child Jesus both Herod and Pilate were gathered together to circumvent the course of Thy Divine will." Instead of that, we read, "Against Thy holy child Jesus both Herod and Pilate were gathered together to do whatever Thy counsel had determined to be done." The idea is that their effort of opposition to the Divine will proved to be a stroke of alliance with it. The measures they took to wreck the ship became the very means of keeping the ship afloat. They met together in a council of war against Christ; unconsciously to themselves they signed a treaty for the promotion of Christ's glory. They thought they were making a will in favour of His enemies; they were really bequeathing all their wealth to the Man of Nazareth. They decreed that He should die; that decree was their contribution of palm-leaves. My brother, God never thwarts adverse circumstances; that is not His method. I have often been struck with these words--"He rideth upon the wings of the wind." They are most suggestive. Our God does not beat down the storms that rise against Him; He rides upon them; He works through them. You are often surprised that so many thorny paths are allowed to be open for the good--how that aspiring boy Joseph is put in a dungeon--how that beautiful child Moses is cast into the Nile. You would have expected Providence to have interrupted the opening of these pits destined for destruction. Well, He might have done so; He might have said to the storm, "Peace, be still!" But there was a more excellent way--to ride upon it.

When We Remember

When We Remember By George Matheson "A new heart also will I give you. Then shall ye remember your own evil ways" (Eze 36:26). The prophet says that the memory of our badness only comes after we have become good. "A new heart will I give you; then shall ye remember your own evil ways." One would have expected the opposite statement. We should have looked for such words as these: "You must expect for a little to be troubled with old memories. You must not be surprised, when you are in the first stage of reformation, to experience the remorse of conscience for bad deeds in the past. When your new nature is complete, when the weaning process is over, when you become accustomed to the corn of the land, you will forget all about your struggles and failures; you will remember your shortcomings no more." The prophet says it is only then you will remember them. He says the valleys of your life will not become visible until you have scaled the height and stood upon the mountain's brow. And truly he is right; experience cries "Amen!" The memory of sin is the latest gift of my Father. His earliest gifts are incentives to move forward; they rather discourage a retrospective view. God says to the beginner, "Forget the things which are behind; press toward the mark of the prize!" But when the mark of the prize is won, when the top of the hill is gained, then for the first time He says, "Look back!" Then, for the first time, memory wakes, and our yesterday appears; and the valley of the past looks lowly and the shadows of the past seem deep. We beat upon our breast and say, "O wretched man that I am!"

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