



HORATIUS BONAR

I HEARD the voice of Jesus say, Come unto me and rest," is one of our best known gospel hymns. It was written by Horatius Bonar, a godly minister of Christ, who was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, Dec.

19, 1808. His ancestors for several generations were ministers of the gospel. "In youth he devoted himself to the service of God," a writer says. By this we suppose he was converted while young, for none can really "devote himself to the service of God," unless he has been "born again," and so made "a new creature in Christ Jesus." Scripture says, "They that are in the flesh cannot please God;" therefore none can serve God acceptably unless they are born anew—born of God.

Mr. Bonar received his early education at the High School and University of Edinburgh; his biographer says, "He was fortunate in having Dr. Chalmers for his teacher. It laid the foundation for solid learning which advanced with growing years... It gave direction and strength to his life when most susceptible of influence."

Few students are favored with such godly instructors to-day; and those taught by infidel or sceptical professors must be on their guard, and hold to the written Word of God as the sheet-anchor of their faith. We may be very sure that Dr. Chalmers did not teach his pupils

what evolutionist teachers are telling students to-day.

Mr. Bonar's public ministry began in 1837 in the famous old town of Kelso on the Tweed. He preached with fervor and unction, and in house-to-house visitation proved himself the comforter of the sorrowful, and guide of the perplexed. This is what Scripture urges upon us, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord;" as the good king Hezekiah also did: "In every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it *with all his heart, and prospered*" (2 Chron. 31: 21).

In 1839 the Free Church of Scotland sent a commission composed of four ministers, of whom Andrew Bonar and R. McCheyne were the younger members, to visit the principal centers of the Jews in Europe and Palestine. It aroused widespread interest and Horatius Bonar also visited Palestine in 1856.

A returned traveler from Palestine relates the following concerning Dr. Bonar: "One dark night in the year 1856, in the city Jeru-

salem, I wandered into a lighted mission-room on Mount Zion, where a small company of men and women of various nationalities and complexions were gathered. At the desk was a man of impressive countenance, of low and musical voice. . . . The preacher, as I learned later, was Dr. Horatius Bonar. Learned and eloquent, there was a wonderful charm in what he said that night, because he had strong convictions on that subject of much speculation—the second coming of the Lord. He believed in His personal coming, to reign on the earth; and his faith, seconded by his rich poetic imagination and fervor, all quickened by the fact that we were in Jerusalem, the city of the Passion, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and the Ascension gave to his words a winning power which I cannot describe. He had no specific time for the Advent. He did not argue in controversy, but gave himself up to the scene where, sooner or later, the King shall come again to walk in the streets of His abasement, in the effulgence of the sunlight that shall attend Him. . . . To hear such a man in Jerusalem, having a firm belief in the personal coming and

reign of Christ, thus to communicate to others freely his confident hopes, was a memorable event."

This visit to Palestine seems to have given occasion for the hymn already mentioned, and which he entitled, "The Voice from Galilee."

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast!"
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting-place,
And He hath made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down, and drink, and live!"
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright!"
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in that Light of life I'll walk
Till trav'ling days are done.

"The impulse given by Dr. Chalmers to Mr. Bonar," says his biographer, "was deepened by his fellowship with Robert McCheyne, of Dundee, where a great revival had sprung up whilst they were away in Palestine on their mission to the Jews. The Spirit of God wrought in power, and many souls were saved. A tide of blessing swept through the land, and Mr. Bonar entered heartily into the movement, and helped to spread it. He spared not himself in his efforts to carry the gospel to the perishing. He spoke as a dying man to dying men, resulting in many conversions. He also wrote 'The Kelso Tracts,' which went where his voice could not reach. His aim was to warn the careless, to present salvation simply, and to edify the saints. These messengers of life went into many homes and were eagerly read. Their circulation in Scotland and England was very large, and they found warm reception in America."

Dr. Bonar remained at Kelso for 28 years, serving in the pulpit, in the study, and at the fireside. He did not seek earthly honor, yet it came to him. His name became known both at home and abroad through his ministry and

his writings. Few poets have done more than Dr. Bonar to enrich our hymnal treasury with gems of truth and power: they will be sung upon earth until they are exchanged for the melodies of heaven.

Dr. Bonar removed from Kelso to Edinburgh in 1865, where he continued to minister till his death. One well acquainted with Dr. Bonar says, "Visitors in Edinburgh might go out of curiosity to see and listen to this 'sweet singer,' but they soon forgot the poet in the preacher. The opening prayer lifted them into the presence of God, and they listened as he went on to speak of a love stronger than death, and of the experiences of a Christian life."

Many of Dr. Bonar's most precious hymns refer to Christ's second coming as the Christian's "blessed hope." In one of his last addresses he says: "I know not but this may be my last opportunity of bearing witness to the much-forgotten doctrine which was so specially given to the Church as her blessed hope; and I wish to say how increasingly important that doctrine is to me as the ages are running to their close, and the power of the great adversary is

unfolding itself both in the church and in the world. . . . The poison of the last days has penetrated everywhere. Unbelief, error, strong delusion, self-will, pride, hatred of God and of His Christ—these are the deadly forces operating all over the earth, disintegrating society, and demonstrating the necessity for the return of Him who is to end all of Satan's and man's evil work, and introduce the kingdom of righteousness and peace."

From this it will be seen that the poet-preacher did not share the error of many to-day—that the world is getting better and that civilization is able to save the world. The hymn-writers of the preceding centuries, whose lives we have sketched, knew little of and wrote little about, the coming and kingdom of the Lord Jesus; it was reserved for God's servants of the 19th Century to understand and teach clearly the truth of what is called the pre-millennial coming of Christ, the tribulation to follow, and then the thousand years' reign.

Dr. Bonar died in Edinburgh, July 31, 1889, and was buried at the base of Calton Hill, where he lies with his kindred, near to the house

of the reformer John Knox. At his funeral no word of eulogy was offered, as was meet; for what better eulogium could he have than the rich legacy of hymns he has left to the household of faith?

Soon, soon, the Saviour of whom he so sweetly wrote, will come, and then in the home of glory above we shall sing together the praises of the precious Saviour.

A Man at God's Right Hand

BY HORATIUS BONAR

I see a Man at God's right hand,
Upon the throne of God,
And there in sevenfold light I see
The sevenfold sprinkled blood.
I look upon that glorious Man,
On that blood-sprinkled throne;
I know that He sits there for me,
That glory is my own.

The heart of God flows forth in love,
A deep eternal stream;
Through that beloved Son it flows
To me as unto Him.
And, looking on His face, I know—
Weak, worthless, though I be—
How deep, how measureless, how sweet,
That love of God to me.