



MUSIC

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1887

Luke ii. 13, 14.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

You have been just singing Christmas hymns; and my text speaks of the first Christmas hymn. Now what the words of that hymn meant; what Peace on earth and good-will towards man meant, I have often told you. To-day I want you, for once, to think of this that it was a hymn; that these angels were singing, even as human beings sing.

Music. There is something very wonderful in music. Words are wonderful enough: but music is even more wonderful. It speaks not to our thoughts as words do: it speaks straight to our hearts and spirits, to the very core and root of our souls. Music soothes us, stirs us up; it puts noble feelings into us; it melts us to tears, we know not how: it is a language by itself, just as perfect, in its way, as speech, as words; just as divine, just as blessed.

Music has been called the speech of angels; I will go further, and call it the speech of God himself and I will, with Gods help, show you a little what I mean this Christmas day.

Music, I say, without words, is wonderful and blessed; one of Gods best gifts to men. But in singing you have both the wonders together, music and words. Singing speaks at once to the head and to the heart, to our understanding and to our feelings; and therefore, perhaps, the most beautiful way in which the reasonable soul of man can show itself (except, of course, doing right, which always is, and always will be, the most beautiful thing) is singing.

Now, why do we all enjoy music? Because it sounds sweet. But why does it sound sweet? That is a mystery known only to God.

Two things I may make you understand two things which help to make music melody and harmony. Now, as most of you know, there is melody in music when the different sounds of the same tune follow each other, so as to give us pleasure; there is harmony in music when different sounds, instead of following each other, come at the same time, so as to give us pleasure.

But why do they please us? and what is more, why do they please angels? and more still, why do they please God? Why is there music in heaven? Consider St. Johns visions in the Revelations. Why did St. John hear therein harpers with their harps, and the mystic beasts, and the elders, singing a new song to God and to the Lamb; and the voices of many angels round about them, whose number was ten thousand times ten thousand?

In this is a great mystery. I will try to explain what little of it I seem to see.

First There is music in heaven, because in music there is no self-will. Music goes on certain laws and rules.

Man did not make those laws of music; he has only found them out: and if he be self-willed and break them, there is an end of his music instantly; all he brings out is discord and ugly sounds. The greatest musician in the world is as much bound by those laws as the learner in the school; and the greatest musician is the one who, instead of fancying that, because he is clever, he may throw aside the laws of music, knows the laws of music best, and observes them most reverently. And therefore it was that the old Greeks, the wisest of all the heathens, made a point of teaching their children music; because, they said, it taught them not to be self-willed and fanciful, but to see the beauty of order, the usefulness of rule, the divineness of law.

And therefore music is fit for heaven; therefore music is a pattern and type of heaven, and of the everlasting life of God, which perfect spirits live in heaven; a life of melody and order in themselves; a life of harmony with each other and with God. Music, I say, is a pattern of the everlasting life of heaven; because in heaven, as in music, is perfect freedom and perfect pleasure; and yet that freedom comes not from throwing away law, but from obeying Gods law perfectly; and that pleasure comes, not from self-will, and doing each what he likes, but from perfectly doing the will of the Father who is in heaven.

And that in itself would be sweet music, even if there were neither voice nor sound in heaven. For wherever there is order and obedience, there is sweet music for the ears of Christ. Whatsoever does its duty, according to its kind which Christ has given it, makes melody in the ears of Christ. Whatsoever is useful to the things around it, makes harmony in the ears of Christ. Therefore those wise old Greeks used to talk of the music of the spheres. They said that sun, moon, and stars, going round each in its appointed path, made as they rolled along across the heavens everlasting music before the throne of God. And so, too, the old Psalms say. Do you not recollect that noble verse, which speaks of the stars of heaven, and says

What though no human voice or sound Amid their radiant orbs be found?
To Reasons ear they all rejoice, And utter forth a glorious voice;
For ever singing as they shine,
The hand that made us is divine.

And therefore it is, that that noble Song of the Three Children calls upon sun and moon, and stars of heaven, to bless the Lord, praise him, and magnify him for ever: and not only upon them, but on the smallest things on earth; on mountains and hills, green herbs and springs, cattle and feathered fowl; they too, he says, can bless the Lord, and magnify him for ever. And how? By fulfilling the law which God has given them; and by living each after their kind, according to the wisdom wherewith Christ the Word of God created them, when he beheld all that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

And so can we, my friends; so can we. Some of us may not be able to make music with our voices: but we can make it with our hearts, and join in the angels song this day, if not with our lips, yet in our lives.

If thou fulfillest the law which God has given thee, the law of love and liberty, then thou makest music before God, and thy life is a hymn of praise to God.

If thou art in love and charity with thy neighbours, thou art making sweeter harmony in the ears of the Lord Jesus Christ, than psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music.

If thou art living a righteous and a useful life, doing thy duty orderly and cheerfully where God has put thee, then thou art making sweeter melody in the ears of the Lord Jesus Christ, than if thou hadst the throat of a nightingale; for then thou in thy humble place art humbly copying the everlasting harmony and melody which is in heaven; the everlasting harmony and melody by which God made the world and all that therein is, and behold it was very good, in the day when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy over the new-created earth, which God had made to be a pattern of his own perfection.

For this is that mystery of which I spoke just now, when I said that music was as it were the voice of God himself. Yes, I say it with all reverence: but I do say it. There is music in God. Not the music of voice or sound; a music which no ears can hear, but only the spirit of a man, when awakened by the Holy Spirit, and taught to know God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There is one everlasting melody in heaven, which Christ, the Word of God, makes for ever, when he does all things perfectly and wisely, and righteously and gloriously, full of grace and truth: and from that all melody comes, and is a dim pattern thereof here; and is beautiful only because it is a dim pattern thereof.

And there is an everlasting harmony in God; which is the harmony between the Father and the Son; who though he be co-equal and co-eternal with his Father, does nothing of himself, but only what he seeth his Father do; saying for ever, "Not my will, but thine be done, and hears his Father answer for ever, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Therefore, all melody and all harmony upon earth, whether in the song of birds, the whisper of the wind, the concurrence of voices, or the sounds of those cunning instruments which man has learnt to create, because he is made in the image of Christ, the Word of God, who creates all things; all music upon earth, I say, is beautiful in as far as it is a pattern and type of the everlasting music which is in heaven; which was before all worlds, and shall be after them; for by its rules all worlds were made, and will be made for ever, even the everlasting melody of the wise and loving will of God, and the everlasting harmony of the Father toward the Son, and of the Son toward the Father, in one Holy Spirit who proceeds from them both, to give melody and harmony, order and beauty, life and light, to all which God has made.

Therefore music is a sacred, a divine, a Godlike thing, and was given to man by Christ to lift our hearts up to God, and make us feel something of the glory and beauty of God and of all which God has made.

Therefore, too, music is most fit for Christmas day, of all days in the year. Christmas has always been a day of songs, of carols and of hymns; and so let it be for ever. If we had no music all the rest of the year in church or out of church, let us have it at least on Christmas day.

For on Christmas day most of all days (if I may talk of eternal things according to the laws of time) was manifested on earth the everlasting music which is in heaven.

On Christmas day was fulfilled in time and space the everlasting harmony of God, when the Father sent the Son into the world, that the world through him might be saved; and the Son refused not, neither shrank back, though he knew that sorrow, shame, and death awaited him, but answered, "A body hast thou prepared me . . . I come to do thy will, oh God! and so emptied himself, and took on himself the form of a slave, and was found in fashion as a man, that he might fulfil not his own will, but the will of the Father who sent him.

On this day began that perfect melody of the Sons life on earth; one song and poem, as it were, of wise words, good deeds, spotless purity, and untiring love, which he perfected when he died, and rose again, and ascended on high for ever to make intercession for us with music sweeter than the song of angels and archangels, and all the heavenly host.

Go home, then, remembering how divine and holy a thing music is, and rejoice before the Lord this day with psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs (by which last I think the apostle means not merely church music for that he calls psalms and hymns but songs which have a good and wholesome spirit in them); and remembering, too, that music, like marriage, and all other beautiful things which God has given to man, is not to be taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but, even when it is most cheerful and joyful (as marriage is), reverently, discreetly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Amen.