



¹ Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: ² She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. ³ She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, ⁴ Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, ⁵ Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. ⁶ Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding. (Prov 9:1-6)

It has been suggested that at least a part of Napoleon's military success in war was owing to the rousing strains of the *la Marseillaise*. I do not doubt that soldiers, and citizens, too, were inspired by the stirring notes and words of that anthem. You may recall the dramatized effect of that tune as sung in the Bogart movie, *Casablanca*. At the first reunion of Confederate and Union soldiers at Gettysburg, an old Confederate shared with his Yankee counterpart, "*If we would've had your music, we would have beat the pants off of you.*" (Battle Hymn of the Republic comes to mind) There is fundamental truth in the fact that music bears the soul of a nation and people. It may have been Lord Acton (not sure) who said: "*Show me a nation's music, and I will tell you the moral character of her people.*" How true that quote is in view of the decadence in music, and in character, that we observe in our modern American (sub) culture.

There are many genres of music – classical (choral and symphonic), military, country & western, pop, etc. Some of the heavy metal and demoralized music we hear in the vulgar production of media do not even meet the definition of music. I suppose the best way to identify good music is by the self-examination of how it makes one feel. Can you relax at its sound, do you have elevated desires to do good, does it make you want to march, or does it cause you to have intemperate desires? Can you identify God's presence therein, for all good art is Godly and inspired by him. An excellent old exhaustive study by the great art critic, Frederick Remington Ruckstuhl (1933), entitled '*Great Works of Art and What Makes Them Great,*' delves into the Creators role in inspiring men such as Bach, Mendelsohn, Handel, Michelangelo, and Davinci – among others. If it is beautiful – whether graphic art or musical art – it is inspired art.

Today's hymn, *Higher Ground*, calls us to a place above the common plain of society – a place nearer to the presence of God. I wish all works that pass today as music could do the same. Remember, music is not amoral, but rather moral. It may present a

good moral lesson, or an immoral one – even *sans* lyrics. Higher Ground, in both lyrics and quality of music, presents a message that brings us nearer to the High Throne of God.

The lyrics were composed by Johnson Oatman, Jr. in 1898 and set to the musical score written by Charles H. Gabriel. It is interesting to note how well the lyrics and music in great music go hand in hand to lift the soul. Mr. Oatman aspired to become, in the tradition of Francis Asbury and Peter Cartwright, another great circuit-riding Methodist preacher. In this he failed. He found his niche at hymn writing at age forty (never receiving more than \$1.00 for any of his 3,000+ hymns). He is the author, also, of “Count Your Blessings,” “No, not One,” and this present hymn.

Higher Ground

I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day;
Still praying as I’m onward bound,
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”

Refrain

Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on Heaven’s table land,
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where those abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.

Refrain

I want to live above the world,
Though Satan’s darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.

Refrain

I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I’ll pray till Heav’n I’ve found,
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”

Refrain

I’m pressing on the upward way, New heights I’m gaining every day; Still praying as I’m onward bound, “Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.” Our lives are filled with challenge and trials, yet the Christian is called to the sanctifying graces of the Gospel in his every decision and action. If our music matches our good character, we may find the road less burdensome, ***Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*** (Matt 7:14) Not only should our actions and words be sanctified, but our taste in music as well. How sad would a nation’s people be if they lacked a rousing national anthem! How sad, and even embarrassing, would the American people be if our great *Star Spangled Banner* were replaced by *Kum ba Yah* which, incidentally, has been suggested by some modern American leader. Our way is the way of ***Excelsior!*** (As in *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*) Our upward way should leave none of our parts behind, but be an upward way in faith, in worship, in musical taste, in art,

in business, and every other avenue of life – to the glory of God.

Refrain

Lord, lift me up and let me stand, By faith, on Heaven's table land, A higher plane than I have found; Lord, plant my feet on higher ground. If we stand at all, it is only upon the solid ground of faith in God. All others stumble as drunken men and fall into the gaping abyss. We may taste the flavor of Heaven even while living in this mortal life if we “*draw near to Christ by faith.*” The Mountain of God is that mountain that stands higher, and mightier, than Everest, or any other mountain of the world. It is the mountain which shall be standing alone when all others are consumed by fervent heat.

My heart has no desire to stay Where doubts arise and fears dismay; Though some may dwell where those abound, My prayer, my aim, is higher ground. Where is YOUR heart today? Is it found among the ruins of this world, or is it found in the treasures of the snow and of Heaven? ***But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*** (Matt 6:20-21) Will your taste in music, art, literature, and righteousness fit well in the neighborhood of Heaven? Is the desire of your heart compatible and congruent with the will of God? There is little room for doubts and fears when we are abiding on the Mountain of God. Consider the blessed Christian people of Syria and Iraq who face beheadings rather than renounce their Lord and Savior. Do we have that steadfast faith?

I want to live above the world, Though Satan's darts at me are hurled; For faith has caught the joyful sound, The song of saints on higher ground. If you wish to live above the world, there will be no place for the world's values of art and music. Leave those to the acid-heads and depraved sorcerers of the world. On the Mountain of God only the clean and wholesome will be admitted. Naturally, Satan is not well pleased with the life of a committed Christian. He is constantly seeking ways and means to cause us to compromise our faith and betray our Lord. The song of faith is a “joyful sound” – not a discordant series of notes out of tune. A joyful sound is not consistent with “rap,” “heavy metal,” or “barroom ballads.” Joyful sound might be glimpsed in Beethoven's 9th Symphony, 5th Movement – Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee; or in Handel's, Messiah – Hallelujah Chorus! That, is God-honoring music, friends! Of course, not all of our music can reach to such grandeur. There is music for sorrow, for happiness, for pining away, and for celebration; but it should never depart so very far from the uplifting chorus of the angels.

I want to scale the utmost height And catch a gleam of glory bright; But still I'll pray till Heav'n I've found, Lord, plant my feet on higher ground. Paul tells us in the Book of Hebrews that those of faith are as pilgrims and strangers in the earth who seeketh after a city – not built with hands. *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.* (Heb 11:13-16) If we are, indeed, pilgrims and strangers in the world seeking a faire country, we should acquit ourselves as such. A pilgrim travels lightly bearing only those articles essential for survival on his back. None of the world's cherished treasure will find place in our Gospel backpacks. The Christian pilgrim is far-sighted to see the gleaming of light from that city set upon a hill. ***Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*** (Matt 5:14) Those false and flickering lights of the world will find no favor in the eyes of the Christian pilgrim. We climb the Narrow Way. We

walk with resolute step. We think only on those things which are beautiful and leave the sordid and discordant notes of the world where they belong – with the lost and dying. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* (Phil 4:8)

I offer a penny for YOUR thoughts, friends.