



*14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. (Gal 6:14)*

As we approach Palm Sunday, it will be appropriate to take a lingering look at that Cross that emerges in the path of every believer in Christ; but it belongs to the Christian because it was purchased by our Lord in His redemption of His people – the Church - of all ages from Abraham until today.

This faithful old hymn expresses the humility and reverence with which the believer should approach that Old, Rugged Cross that was reared, two thousand years ago, on a Hill called Calvary on Mount Moriah (outside the walls of Jerusalem). The words and music were composed by George Bennard in 1913 and was known throughout the world shortly thereafter. The musical score and lyrics are perfectly wed together to arouse the deepest of spiritual consciousness and compassion. The author did not have a moment when the words came, at random order, to his mind. He studied all scripture related to the Cross of Christ and prayerfully consumed it all. He came to know that the cross was not an ornament, but a real instrument of torture upon which our Lord suffered. It is not a golden trinket or badge of boasting, but an ugly and cruel device for the slow death of our Lord.

I would like to quote the testimony of a Canadian gentleman whom I consider to be the greatest gospel singer of all time regarding today's hymn:

*"I was just a small boy in Winchester, Ontario, and one day two fine singers, from the USA, came to home and asked my mother to play for them, while they sang a song they said was new, the Old Rugged Cross. I stood transfixed, near the piano, and watched their faces as they described, in this tender song, the suffering of the Lord. At a later time, I came to know the wonder of God's forgiveness."*

## The Old Rugged Cross

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,  
The emblem of suffering and shame;  
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

*Refrain*

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,  
Till my trophies at last I lay down;  
I will cling to the old rugged cross,  
And exchange it some day for a crown.

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,  
Has a wondrous attraction for me;  
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above  
To bear it to dark Calvary.

*Refrain*

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,  
A wondrous beauty I see,  
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,  
To pardon and sanctify me.

*Refrain*

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true;  
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;  
Then He'll call me some day to my home far away,  
Where His glory forever I'll share.

*Refrain*

*"On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, The emblem of suffering and shame; And I love that old cross where the dearest and best For a world of lost sinners was slain."* That lonely Place of the Skull (Golgotha) still stands as a brooding reminder of that dreadful sacrifice of our Lord so long ago. The suffering of Christ was viewed from afar off by those disciples who fled from Him at the moment of His betrayal. They stood hidden in the shrubs and hedges that bordered the surrounding hills and walls of Jerusalem, and they watched. Actually, there was nothing more that they could do but 'watch.' We stood, in principle, alongside these watchers at Calvary. *"And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things."* (Luke 23:49) We could have no part in the purchase of our salvation for it must be solely the role of God to make that purchase. He suffered that terrible pain and rejection so that you and I might be spared the ordeal in the same sense; that is, those who are the children of God and believers in Christ will not be rejected by God Almighty for our sins for He took them unto Himself at Calvary! *"In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee."* (Isaiah 54:14)

I hasten to point out that ALL of the disciples did not hide away from the Cross that day. The Apostle of Love (John) tells us of this tender moment from the Cross: *"<sup>25</sup> Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, **Woman, behold thy son!** <sup>27</sup> Then saith he to the disciple, **Behold thy mother!** And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own*

home.” (John 19:25-27) Why do you suppose only these women and this one disciple remained at the cross in spite of the danger and fear? The answer resides in that blessed gift called LOVE! The three Mary’s and John loved Jesus with a love that transcended any concerns for personal well-being. Isn’t that the kind of love each of us should evince?

*“O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world, Has a wondrous attraction for me; For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above To bear it to dark Calvary.”* That rude cross was born by Christ from the glories of Heaven down to His incarnated existence among us. The shadow of the cross forever darkened His brow and remained a fixed anticipation throughout His earthly ministry. Was He not, likewise, laid in a crude wooden manger at birth and did not His hands of Love and compassion create many items of the carpenter’s art from that wood? A wood of like nature held Him by nails to that cross at Calvary. He willingly consented in the Councils of Heaven in Eternity Past to leave the Glory on High and deigned to become like unto one of us in order that we could know God in intimacy and to be redeemed by His blessed blood. It is Love for Christ that draws us to the Cross – His Cross, and our own cross as well. The world can never grasp the depth of the Son of God (the Lamb of God) redeeming us by His own blood. It makes no sense to the world even if they believed that God had a Son!

*“In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, A wondrous beauty I see, For ‘twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, To pardon and sanctify me.”* The Blood of Christ was not the same blood that flows in our veins. Our blood is tainted with that deadly sin of Adam; but the blood of Christ is the Blood of His Father – despite the claims of new Bible versions, Joseph was not the father of Christ but, as the KJV reads from the correct manuscript evidence, Joseph was the “presumed” father of Jesus. If our blood is tainted with a deadly disease that cannot be separated from that blood, what is the remedy? We must have a blood transfusion of clean, undefiled blood – the Blood of Christ. Only a Christian can see beauty in such an instrument of torture as the Cross. How is this? It is because of two opposing characteristics of that Cross. Yes, it is ugly, and a thing of terror; however, its hateful visage is covered by that Blood which saves and justifies the lost sinner who turns to Him. The intent (Satan’s attempt to destroy God’s purpose) of the Cross is, indeed, ugly; but the PURPOSE (God’s love in redeeming) is, indeed, beautiful.

*“To the old rugged cross I will ever be true; Its shame and reproach gladly bear; Then He’ll call me some day to my home far away, Where His glory forever I’ll share.”* Are we true to that old rugged cross? Do we gladly bear its shame and reproach? How easily we are offended at church over things that are of no consequence to faith and worship. We desire our every wish to be agreed to by all, or we will take our choir robes and go home! When another’s good labors are recognized by others, do we slink off to the hat closet and mope? How easily we are offended, and what a contrast to the offense we gave Christ in abandoning Him at the moment of crisis; in betraying Him (you DID whether you admit it or not)! How lightly we take our claims of faith in hating our brothers and sisters for far less offenses than we have committed in secret! He will, at the day of His own choosing, call us to His home far away. But that home is not so far away from those who deeply love our Lord – it is right there in the hidden chambers of their hearts!

#### **THE REFRAIN**

*“So I’ll cherish the old rugged cross, Till my trophies at last I lay down; I will cling to the old rugged cross, And exchange it some day for a crown.”* I cherish the Lord’s Love that is symbolized in that old rugged cross. But I truly have no trophies to

lie down. If I have trophies of good works, those belong to Christ who works IN me, and not my own feeble rags of unrighteousness. In a sense, we do cling to that old rugged cross, but more than that, to the wonderful Savior who suffered on that cross. Rather than cling to the cross, why not take it up daily, bear it with you along the way, to suffer on that cross by loving our neighbor as ourselves. One point about bearing an ugly cross – it cannot be hidden from view. It cannot be a shame or an embarrassment to us. IT is clumsy and not a thing of pride, but of humiliation. It is not made of gold, but of rough-hewn wood. It is not decorated with lilies, or green wreaths of the olive. Its nails protrude and offend us. It is a shame that Christ bore for us, and not for His own self. The cross is a thing that we bear for others, and not for ourselves. Do we do this, friends?