



But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10)

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. (Psalm 91:1-2)

This is the most beautiful hymn for Evensong of which I am aware. Its placid and soothing lines speak to the heart of the soul in the gloaming of the day. Its composer, Sabine Baring-Gould, was an Anglican cleric of the 19th century who was born into a wealthy family. He had many varied interests including Archaeology. He is also the author of many books and hymns. His most famous hymn is *Onward Christian Soldiers*. There is an amazing difference in mood and tempo in this latter hymn and the one under study in this devotion. The tune provided in the 1940 Hymnal is *Eudoxia* by the same author; however, the more popular, and in my view more appealing, is *Merrial* by Joseph Barnby.

Now that Day is Over

Now that day is over, night is drawing nigh,
shadows of the evening steal across the sky.
Now the darkness gathers, stars begin to peep,
birds, and beasts and flowers soon will be asleep.

Jesus, give the weary calm and sweet repose;
with thy tenderest blessing may mine eyelids close.
Grant to little children visions bright of thee;
guard the sailors tossing on the deep, blue sea.

Comfort those who suffer, watching late in pain;
those who plan some evil from their sin restrain.
Through the long night watches may thine angels spread
their white wings above me, watching round my bed.

When the morning wakens, then may I arise
pure, and fresh, and sinless in thy holy eyes.
Glory to the Father, glory to the Son,
and to thee, blest Spirit, while all ages run.

Our days are often hectic and full of care. There seems to be too few hours to complete the plans we have made. Life is that way, too. As the shadows of life lengthen, we find that we may have been too careless of time and service. *“Now that day is over, night is drawing nigh, shadows of the evening steal across the sky. Now the darkness gathers, stars begin to peep, birds, and beasts and flowers soon will be asleep.”* As darkness of day, and darkness of life, closes about us, our senses are more keen to the beauty and blessing of the light of day. If we are young and rambunctious, we may rebel against the surrender of sleep. We do not want to give up the joy of the day. But as we grow older, we welcome the inviting surrender to sleep and rest. It is natural. The same is true of the good Christian heart that draws near to the veil of earthly death and looks beyond to behold that peace and reverie that lies in its welcoming parlor. The time approaches when our earthly strife is over, and the coming of the long night of the soul actually heralds a beautiful Day Break beyond the bounds of time.

There are never heard expressions of regret espoused by the dying of not having sinned more! If there are regrets expressed, they usually are of not having shown more love, compassion, and a better example than they have done. One of the finest Christian men I have known spent all of his spare time caring for orphans who were unable to belong to the boy Scouts because due to reasons of purchasing uniforms and transportation. This fellow purchased a van and made his rounds regularly in picking up those boys, buying those uniforms, and caring for them as a Scout sponsor just as their father should have done. On his deathbed, his only regret was that he did not do more. *“Jesus, give the weary calm and sweet repose; with thy tenderest blessing may mine eyelids close. Grant to little children visions bright of thee; guard the sailors tossing on the deep, blue sea.”* I conducted a funeral service for a dear lady two years back who was forever visiting the sick in hospital – carrying them flowers and sharing with them all that Christ had done for her. The patients were always uplifted by her sweet and kind attentions. She had planned to retire on January 1st of 2014 so that she could devote more time to her granddaughter and in hospital visitations, but she tragically came down with a painful case of cancer. She suffered from the day of her retirement until the merciful Angel of Death gently lifted her in his arms and bore her on high to her Father in Heaven. Miraculously, this woman, worn with pain and suffering, died with a beautiful smile on her face. It bore testimony of her eternal security in Christ.

I have seen men die in terror and panic who knew not the Lord, but the Comforting Angel of Death gives solace and peace to those who call upon the name of the Lord. *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* (Matt 11:28) The rest He offers is not only for this life, but the eternity to come. It is not the rest of death, but the rest of life – our Eternal Sabbath. His eye is on the sparrow, and it is also on the sailors who struggle at the helm and rudder during the storms of the sea.

The beauty of a classical hymn is that it is not simply a song, but a Godly prayer offered under biblical terms. Observe the plea of prayer in the next verse: *“Comfort*

those who suffer, watching late in pain; those who plan some evil from their sin restrain. Through the long night watches may thine angels spread their white wings above me, watching round my bed." Please note that the plea is not to REMOVE the pain, but to comfort the sufferer in it. If we have the favor of God, we need not beg for bread, water, or shelter – He will provide, as a loving Father, the needs of our souls. The late pain of death is the most tragic to the unbeliever, but the mounting pain of a sufferer in Christ is merely a culmination of the pain of life which soon will end with the glorious resurrection to a painless and joyful fellowship with the Lord Himself. I do believe, my friends, with all of my heart, that God's Holy Angels do gather around the deathbed of a child of God as the hour of transport approaches.

We know that the dead in Christ receive an angelic escort to Paradise according to the promise of God. *"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom:"* (Luke 16:19-22) We see that even a poor and sickly beggar is given an angelic escort to Paradise if he claims God as His Father. Lazarus awakened in Paradise. But what of the self-satisfied and uncaring rich man? *". . . the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."* (Luke 16:22-23) The rich man woke up in Hell. He was not an outwardly awful sinner, but he cared little for God or his fellow man.

It is very true that *". . . weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."* (Psalm 30:5) The glorious sunrise will always follow the dark and stormy night of woe. Even the storm had its purpose in cleaning and replenishing the earth, and the Sun arises to give life to that replenished soul. Our closing stanza seals the love and hope with which this hymn is so richly endowed: *"When the morning wakens, then may I arise pure, and fresh, and sinless in thy holy eyes. Glory to the Father, glory to the Son, and to thee, blest Spirit, while all ages run."* When the little child awakens from a sound night's sleep, his first thoughts are not of sin or bad things, but he is eager to jump from the bed and get out of doors into the sunlight of God's Creation.

When the child of God awakens after that long night of sorrow or death, he awakens to a new and an Eternal Day. He is eager to play in the fields of the Lord – to run and jump on legs that once could not even bear his weight; to see the beautiful creatures of God that are all loving and untainted with the sin of Adam. How pleasing to touch the head of the formidable lion and have it caress the hand that pets it. What a joy to know that we have arrived at our happy home, and that our Father has erased every remembrance of our sins. He has clothed us with a resplendent robe of fine white linen which can never be soiled – purchased at the high cost of the blood of His only Begotten Son. Yes, indeed, the Triune God will be our focus of praise and glory, but not just while all ages run, but beyond to the measureless ages of Eternity Future.